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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Uncertainty looms over talks in Pak as US seizes Iran ship

Iran vows to retaliate; Pak doubles efforts to end impasse

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN/ ISLAMABAD, 20 APRIL

A dramatic US naval seizure of an Iranian-flagged vessel in the Gulf of Oman has sharply escalated tensions between Washington and Tehran, casting fresh uncertainty over planned peace talks in Islamabad and prompting Iran to signal it may not attend the next round of negotiations.

The incident has emerged as the first major interception since the United States imposed a blockade on Iranian ports last week, further straining already fragile diplomatic efforts aimed at extending a ceasefire due to expire mid-week. Iran has vowed a swift response.

US officials said the Navy intercepted the cargo ship Touska after it allegedly attempted to breach a US-enforced blockade near the Strait of Hormuz. President Donald Trump said a guided missile destroyer issued repeated warnings before opening fire. "We stopped them right in their tracks by blowing a hole in the engine room," he posted on social media, adding that US Marines boarded the vessel and "are seeing what's on board".

US officials said the Navy intercepted the cargo ship Touska after it allegedly attempted to breach a US-enforced blockade —*SCREENGRAB*

WEST ASIA WAR
DAY-52

US Central Command described the operation as "deliberate, professional and proportional", stating that the ship ignored multiple warnings over a six-hour period. Video released by the military showed warnings being issued before the vessel was disabled and boarded.

The escalation comes just day before a second round of US-Iran talks scheduled in Islamabad. Pakistan has placed the capital under tight security, deploying more than 10,000 personnel and sealing off key diplomatic and administrative zones, including areas around the Serena and Marriott hotels, where delegations are expected to stay.

> **Israel never talked me into the war with Iran, the results of Oct. 7th, added to my lifelong opinion that IRAN CAN NEVER HAVE A NUCLEAR WEAPON, did**
>
> —Donald Trump, US President

Despite the tensions, there was no immediate change in Trump's claim that US negotiators would arrive in Islamabad on Monday evening. Meanwhile, Pakistani leaders have intensified diplomatic engagement. Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi discussed the situation over the phone, stressing continued dialogue. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also spoke with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian —*PTI*

>>>*More on Pages 5 & 6*

5-day shutdown derails normal life in Manipur

IMPHAL, 20 APRIL

A five-day total shutdown called by civil society groups to protest the death of two children in a bomb attack earlier this month in Manipur has brought normal life to a standstill across the state's valley districts

Normal life in several hill and valley districts of Manipur was affected on Monday following two shutdowns called by different organisations to protest the killing of two children and a couple of civilians by suspected militants earlier this month, officials said.

Educational establishments and markets remained closed, while public transport remained off the roads in all five valley districts, home to the Meitei community, and Naga-inhabited areas of Ukhrul and Senapati districts, they said.

Sit-ins against the killings were held at various parts of Imphal valley including Uripok and the Nagaram locality in the capital.

Women's organisation Meira Paibis called a five-day shutdown from Sunday to protest the 7 April bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district, in which a 5-year-old boy and his 6-month-old sister were killed while sleeping, and their mother was injured.

Educational establishments and markets remained closed, while public transport remained off the roads —*ANI*

- Normal life in several hill and valley districts of Manipur was affected on Monday following shutdowns called by different organisations to protest the killing of two children and a couple of civilians by suspected militants.

The United Naga Council also called a three-day "total shutdown" beginning Monday to condemn the death of a retired soldier and another person after militants fired at an Ukhrul-bound convoy of civilian vehicles on 18 April.

Meanwhile, a group of Imphal-based Meitei civil organisations functioning under the Coordinating Committee on Manipur (COCOMI) announced on Sunday a boycott of the BJP in the state. The COCOMI appealed to the public not to participate in any activity of the BJP or its leaders. —*PTI*

>>>*More on Page 4*

NSA meets Saudi leaders amid Iran war

RIYADH, 20 APRIL

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval has met Saudi Arabia's senior leaders and discussed bilateral relations, the regional situation and other areas of mutual interests. Doval, who reached Riyadh on Sunday, was received at the airport by India's Ambassador Suhel Khan and Saudi Arabia's Deputy Minister for Political Affairs Saud Al-Sati. Doval held meetings with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan, Energy Minister Abdulaziz bin Salman and National Security Advisor Musaed Al-Aiban. During the meetings, the two sides discussed bilateral relations, the regional situation and other issues of mutual interests, the Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia said on X. Doval's visit comes amid possible US-Iran talks. —*PTI*

21 dead as bus rolls down hill in J&K's Udhampur

JAMMU, 20 APRIL

A passenger bus rolled down a hillside in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district on Monday, killing 21 people and injuring 29 others, officials said.

The bus crushed an auto-rickshaw before landing upside down on the road below. Those travelling in the auto-rickshaw were injured.

An Army convoy passing nearby led the rescue. The bus driver lost control while negotiating a blind curve near Kagort village at around 10 am.

The bus was carrying 50 passengers, mostly those heading to their daily jobs, from Ramnagar to Udhampur.

The rescue proved extremely challenging as the vehicle had been reduced to a mangled heap of iron, with its top portion almost completely torn off.

Prime Minister Modi announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the families of those killed and Rs 50,000 for those injured in the accident.

Wrecked remains of a passenger bus after it rolled down a hill, in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district on Monday —*PTI*

"A bus going from Ramnagar to Udhampur lost control while negotiating a hilly stretch, plunged down the slope, crushed an auto-rickshaw and landed upside down on the road below. Fifteen passengers were found dead at the scene, while four others later died in hospital," DIG, Udhampur-Reasi Range, Shiv Kumar Sharma told reporters.

Officials said two more critically injured persons died at the Udhampur District Hospital, raising the death toll to 21.

The vehicle was later straightened using a hydraulic crane, the DIG said.

An army soldier, who was leading a convoy from Udhampur to Ramnagar, said they swung into action immediately after noticing the civilian vehicle rolling down the hill. — —*PTI*

>>>*More on Page 4*

India, S Korea set $50B trade target by 2030

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

India and South Korea on Monday agreed to nearly double bilateral trade to USD 50 billion by 2030 and upgrade their Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) within a year, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi said both nations project a message of peace and stability amid global tensions.

Following talks between Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung, the two sides signed 15 agreements, including pacts on industrial cooperation and the steel supply chain, and unveiled a joint strategic vision for their special strategic partnership.

The leaders agreed to expand cooperation in energy, defence, critical minerals, shipbuilding and semiconductors. They also released a framework for collaboration in shipbuilding, shipping and maritime logistics, and a joint statement on energy security.

Both countries decided to resume CEPA upgrade talks and set up a Korean industrial township in India. An 'Economic Security Dialogue' and a foreign ministerial framework on climate change, Arctic and maritime issues were also launched.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung in New Delhi —*PTI*

Modi said bilateral trade has reached USD 27 billion and highlighted plans to boost financial flows, business ties and critical technology cooperation. Lee termed the upgraded economic framework a "new engine for shared growth".

The two leaders discussed global issues, including the West Asia crisis, and reaffirmed commitment to a free, inclusive Indo-Pacific. —*PTI*

Nitish quit as Bihar CM as he was compromised: RaGa

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, launched a fierce attack on the NDA, making a new claim about the recent exit of BJP ally Nitish Kumar from the chief minister's post in Bihar.

Rahul alleged that the former Bihar CM was "compromised." Campaigning for the DMK–Congress alliance at Thoothukudi, Rahul targeted JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar, saying, "Nitish did not say a word. He silently went to the Rajya Sabha."

Rahul also trained his guns on the BJP, asserting, "We will never allow the BJP to have a government they can control in Tamil Nadu. The BJP wants a chief minister in TN who does exactly what they say." Recently, Nitish entered the RS as a debutant, in a move widely seen as a farewell to Bihar politics. —*Agencies*

BASAVA JAYANTHI

CM Siddaramaiah pays floral tribute to Basavanna on his birth anniversary at Chalukya Circle in Bengaluru. He said the principles of the 12th-century social reformer will remain relevant as long as the rigid caste system persists, adding that the Lingayat sect stands for equality and humanity —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

HC flags Rs 100cr gap in Vijay's affidavit

CHENNAI, 20 APRIL

The Madras High Court has directed the Income Tax Department to respond to a petition alleging a mismatch of over Rs 100 crore in the election affidavits of actor Vijay.

The order comes as a setback for Vijay and his party Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), which is contesting its first election in Tamil Nadu, ruled by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin of the DMK.

Vijay has filed nominations from two constituencies — Tiruchirapalli and Perambur. A voter from Perambur moved the court, alleging discrepancies in the income declared in the two affidavits.

According to the plea, Vijay declared an income of about Rs 220 crore in his Tiruchirapalli affidavit, while the Perambur filing showed around Rs 115 crore, indicating a difference of nearly Rs 105 crore. —*PTI*

Govt denies reports of aircraft crash in Chhattisgarh

JASHPUR, 20 APRIL

The Chhattisgarh government on Monday dismissed reports of a private aircraft crash in Jashpur district, saying no evidence had been found. It added that locals had not reported hearing any explosion, as would be expected in such an incident.

The clarification came after claims that a private plane had crashed on a hillside in the Jashpur–Narayanpur region, allegedly killing both pilots. However, both the state government and the Ministry of Civil Aviation said there were no confirmed reports of any crash.

Thick smoke was seen in the area, prompting an inquiry. According to officials, the smoke was reported from Narayanpur. Collector Rohit Vyas and SSP Lal Umend Singh inspected the site. Information is still being gathered. —*PTI*

EVENT POSTPONED

Fire at Rajasthan refinery a day before inauguration by PM

NEW DELHI/ JAIPUR, 20 APRIL

A major fire broke out at the new Rs 79,450 crore Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) refinery in Rajasthan on Monday, a day before its scheduled inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The inauguration has been postponed.

The blaze started at the refiner's crude distillation unit—often referred to as the heart of an oil refinery—and was successfully doused in two hours, with no reported casualties.

Modi was scheduled to dedicate the 9 million tonnes-per-annum oil refinery-cum-petrochemical complex in Pachpadra, Balotra district, to the nation on Tuesday. However, a new inauguration date has yet to be announced.

The Union Petroleum Ministry in a post on X, announced the postponement of the event and said an investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the fire and implement corrective measures. Currently, the cause of the fire is unknown.

Firefighters douse a blaze at the refinery in Rajasthan's Balotra —*PTI*

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in the state assembly Tika Ram Jully called the incident "serious and concerning" and questioned the state government's preparedness ahead of the high-profile event. He accused the government of rushing the arrangements for the event at the cost of safety.

The refinery project was scheduled to begin commercial operations on 1 July, as per approval from the Union Cabinet to increase project funding. —*PTI*

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Three injured after bus rams into car in Mandya

MANDYA, 20 APRIL

Three people were injured early Monday morning when a private tourist bus allegedly rammed into a car on the Mysuru-Bengaluru Highway near Budanur, police said. The accident occurred around 4.30am within Mandya Rural police station limits. The Kerala-bound bus was en route to Bengaluru when it hit the car, injuring its sole occupant, Duraiswamy, and two bus passengers. The bus then crashed into a roadside barrier. All injured were hospitalised. A case has been registered at Mandya Rural police station, and the bus has been seized *—Salar News*

KGF police raid rowdy sheeters' homes

KOLAR GOLD FIELDS, 20 APRIL

KGF police on Monday conducted early morning raids on the residences of known rowdy sheeters across multiple police limits as part of initiatives to curb crime. Under the guidance of SP Shivanshu Rajput, teams raided 10 habitual offenders' homes in Robertsonpet, Andersonpet, and surrounding areas. Five inspectors, ten sub-inspectors, and about sixty personnel participated. Police recovered two lethal weapons from Jayakanth alias Jayakumar's residence, who was detained under the Arms Act. Another weapon was seized from Sharath Kumar alias Dodda Sharath's house, and he was also taken into custody. Both suspects were produced before court. SP Rajput emphasised ongoing monitoring and warned of strict action against unlawful activities. *—Salar News*

Ayurvedic doctor murdered on day of 2nd wedding

SIRSI, 20 APRIL

An Ayurvedic doctor was found murdered at his residence on Monday, the day scheduled for his second marriage. The victim, 51-year-old Ramesh Kalaghatkar from Kundagol taluk, Dharwad, was living alone in KHB Colony, Sirsi. Police suspect the murder occurred on Saturday night, but it was discovered only on Sunday when relatives arrived. Finding the door locked and no response, they broke in and found his body. Kalaghatkar's wife had died six to seven months ago, and he was preparing to remarry. Investigators noted the house was locked from outside, suggesting the assailants secured the premises before fleeing. *—Salar News*

Cabinet calls spl meet for SC internal quota

Meet is on 24 April as govt eyes to fill 65K vacancies; Quota finalisation key to recruitments

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

The meeting was earlier scheduled for 27 March but was cancelled due to the model code of conduct *–X/@SIDDARAMAIAH*

The Karnataka government has convened a special Cabinet meeting on 24 April to discuss internal reservation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), government sources said on Monday. The meeting was earlier scheduled for 27 March but was cancelled due to the model code of conduct for the assembly bypolls in Davangere South and Bagalkot on 9 April. With the elections now concluded, the government has decided to proceed.

The discussion is seen as crucial to fill 65,000 vacant government posts, with sources noting that the state has over 2.5 lakh vacancies across departments. Officials said recruitment cannot move forward unless the internal reservation framework is finalised. The government is also seeking to speed up hiring amid growing unrest among unemployed youth, following a major protest in Hubballi on 24 February this year.

As of April 2026, the state is working on finalising internal reservation within the existing 17 per cent SC quota, proposed to be distributed among 101 sub-castes. The suggested formula allocates roughly 6 per cent each to SC Left and SC Right groups, and about 5 per cent to other SC communities. The proposal, however, remains under legal scrutiny.

A key legal hurdle is a recent direction from the Karnataka High Court, which has effectively put a hold on the implementation of the enhanced reservation levels introduced under the 2022 amendment Act (17 per cent for SCs and 7 per cent for Scheduled Tribes). The court has clarified that, until the case is finally decided, recruitment notifications cannot rely on these increased quotas. In practical terms, this means the government must continue with the earlier reservation structure or maintain status quo arrangements while the legality of the enhanced percentages remains under adjudication.

The government has indicated that recruitment processes initiated before November 2025 will be completed under existing legal provisions.

The move follows long-standing demands to address disparities among Dalit groups, supported by a commission based on a statewide survey of 1.07 crore SC citizens. *—PTI*

PM can't call Opposition anti-national: Margaret Alva

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Congress leader and former governor Margaret Alva has criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation following the defeat of the delimitation-related bill in the Lok Sabha, saying the remarks lacked the "decorum expected of the office of the Prime Minister".

Alva said the Prime Minister's comments describing the Congress as "anti-national" and "anti-women" were inappropriate and went beyond the role of a constitutional head of government. "He is the Prime Minister of even those who did not vote for the BJP. His duty is to uphold the Constitution, not speak as a party leader," she said, adding that opposition parties should not be labelled in such terms from the Prime Minister's platform.

She also alleged that the special parliamentary session and related legislative moves were politically timed to influence public perception ahead of elections, claiming the objective was to project the Congress as opposed to women's reservation and other key issues.

Responding to discussions around the Women's Reservation Bill and its implementation timeline, Alva said delaying its enforcement would dilute its intent.

"Why postpone it by 5 or 10 years? Many of us may not live to see it implemented," she said, arguing that the law should come into effect immediately based on the current composition of Parliament.

On the issue of delimitation and seat allocation, she questioned the proposed redistribution of parliamentary constituencies, warning that it could disadvantage southern states. She said states with higher development indicators and tax contributions should not be penalised, and argued that regions lagging behind require support to catch up, but not at the cost of political representation of better-performing states *—Salar News*

KPCC Mahila Morcha President Sowmya Reddy with Congress leader Margaret Alva and others address a press conference *–PTI*

CM accuses PM of 'double standards' on women's quota

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of adopting "double standards" on women's reservation, alleging that the Centre had delayed its implementation despite having the opportunity to act earlier.

Addressing reporters here on Monday, Siddaramaiah said the BJP and Modi had earlier opposed welfare guarantees and were now replicating them, while also questioning the timing and intent behind the women's reservation move.

"That's what I call double standards. Modi is not for social justice. If he was, this would have been done long ago. How many years has he been in power? It's been 12 years. Why hasn't it been done so far?" he asked.

The Chief Minister reiterated that the Congress had consistently supported women's reservation and accused the Centre of "politicising" the issue. "The PM asked me what our stand was. I said we are in favour of women's reservation," he said, referring to recent discussions with the PM.

He maintained that delimitation should be carried out only after a new census. Highlighting Congress' role, he said, "Who brought the 73rd and 74th amendments? It was Rajiv Gandhi and the Congress. Those amendments ensured 50 per cent reservation for women in local bodies. Why would we oppose it?" *—PTI*

ED raids in Bengaluru

Raids are politically motivated: Priyank Kharge

CRPF personnel stand guard during an ED raid at the residence of MLA NA Haris in Ashok Nagar, Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday raided multiple locations linked to the sons of Congress MLA NA Haris, prompting a fierce backlash from Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge.

Calling the action politically motivated, Kharge accused central agencies, including the ED, Income Tax Department and CBI, of functioning as "tools of the BJP," and questioned the timing and intent behind the searches.

The ED on Monday carried out raids at 12 locations across Bengaluru, targeting properties linked to Haris' sons Mohammed Haris Nalapad and Omar Farooq Nalapad. The ED also raided Aqeeb Khan, the grandson of former Union minister in the UPA regime and former deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha K Rahman Khan. The searches are part of a wider money laundering probe tied to a high-profile cybercrime case involving alleged hacker Srikrishna Ramesh, also known as Sriki.

Investigators believe the case traces back to a 2017 hacking operation in which national and international websites were breached, bitcoins were stolen, and the digital assets were allegedly laundered through cryptocurrency platforms.

The Haris brothers had earlier been questioned by a Karnataka Police Special Investigation Team (SIT). At the time, Mohammed Nalapad, former state youth Congress president, denied any wrongdoing.

Kharge, however, took aim at the ED's track record, pointing to its low conviction rate and arguing that the "real reason" behind the raids remains unclear.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that he was unaware of the raids. When asked about the raids, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar defended Haris and said he has not done anything wrong. "It is just a political ploy. Let them hold an inquiry. There is nothing wrong in conducting an inquiry," he said.

The controversy also revives the explosive allegations made by Congress leaders in 2021, who had claimed that Sriki hacked bitcoins worth nearly Rs 10,000 crore and demanded a probe into possible links to leaders of the then BJP government in Karnataka. *—Salar News*

Kalaburagi man out on bail in POCSO case found dead

KALABURAGI, 20 APRIL

A 26-year-old man out on bail in a POCSO case was dead under suspicious circumstances in Kalaburagi's Hulsgud village of Kalagi taluk on Friday, police said.

The deceased, as Revanasiddappa Talakeri, was found dead near outskirts of the village after reportedly leaving home saying he was going for nature's call. His family has alleged murder, though police have not ruled out suicide.

Revanasiddappa, who had married a minor girl, had been jailed under a POCSO case and was released on bail two weeks ago.

Rattakal police have registered a case under Unnatural Death Report (UDR).

According to DySP Sangamanath Hiremath, who spoke to Salar News, a POCSO case had been registered against Talakeri at Allapur police station in Telangana in January, following a complaint by a minor girl's family. He had spent around 15 days in jail and was released on bail. Police said Talakeri, a goods auto driver, had eloped with the minor and married her. After the girl was taken back by her family, he was reportedly distressed. "Officials are verifying records, including documents and his mobile phone," the cop said. *—Salar News*

MISCREANTS VANDALISE GANDHI STATUE IN HAVERI

HAVERI, 20 APRIL

Unidentified miscreants allegedly vandalised the Mahatma Gandhi statue on MG Road in Haveri city. A case has been registered, and police are inspecting CCTV footage from Sunday night into early Monday, though one camera in the area was reportedly shut down.

Taking cognisance of the incident, Haveri Superintendent of Police Yashoda Vantagodi and the city police visited the spot and conducted an inspection. The case has been registered under the jurisdiction of Haveri city police station.

The police have moved the 2-foot-tall defaced statue to the city police station. Locals expressed anger at the act and called for a prompt investigation. Further details are awaited as the investigation continues.

The incident echoes a similar act of vandalism in March, when a statue of BR Ambedkar was defaced at Ambedkar Park in Srinagar, Uttarakhand. There too, public outrage followed, with people from various organisations lodging a complaint at Srinagar Kotwali and demanding strict action. *— ANI*

Flight circles for 4 hours before diversion to B'luru

HUBBALLI, 20 APRIL

A Fly91 flight from Hyderabad to Hubballi, carrying around 40 passengers, remained airborne for nearly four hours on Sunday due to adverse weather before being diverted to Bengaluru, officials said.

The flight took off from Hyderabad at 3pm and was scheduled to land in Hubballi within 90 minutes. However, worsening weather conditions — including crosswinds, rain, cloud cover and poor visibility — prevented landing.

The aircraft circled over Hubballi, located about 400 km from Bengaluru, before the pilot opted to divert it to Kempegowda International Airport as conditions showed no signs of improvement. The flight landed safely in Bengaluru at around 6.30 pm.

An airport official said such diversions are standard safety measures. The airline also clarified that there was no technical snag, countering reports in a section of the media.

The flight later departed for Hubballi at around 11 pm after weather conditions improved.

The prolonged time in the air triggered panic among some passengers. "We were not sure if we would make it. Many passengers were praying and in tears," one passenger told Salar News.

According to the airline, diverting the flight to Bengaluru was in line with standard operating procedure and among the best practices followed in the aviation industry. *—Salar News*

RELIEF FROM HEAT

Rain, hails to lash K'taka for 4 days

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

After a long spell of scorching heat conditions with temperatures threatening to touch 45°C in many places, people in several districts of Karnataka can heave a sigh of relief with weatherman forecasting rain and hailstorms over the next four days.

The weather office has issued a high alert for the coastal regions, Malnad and North Karnataka beginning 20 April with forecasts of heavy rainfall accompanied by gusty winds, thunderstorms and lightening.

Particularly, the coastal districts of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Uttara Kannada, besides the bordering Kasaragod are likely to experience cloudy conditions in the afternoon to be followed by high intensity thunderstorm and strong winds.

According to weather scientist the shift in weather is largely due to increased air pressure over the Arabian sea. As a result, the hill districts of Kodagu, Hassan, Chikkamagaluru, and Shivamogga are expected to witness a sudden change in weather with possibility of hailstroms and lightening during evening.

The weather office has issued a high alert for the coastal regions, Malnad and North Karnataka beginning 20 April *–MOHAMMED ASAD*

The unseasonal rains and thunderstorms are likely to effect coffee, pepper, and mango growers in Karnataka.

For the North Karnataka the shift in weather conditions is likely to bring relief from the severe heat conditions. Moderate to heavy rainfall with thunderstorms are likely over the next three to four days in North Interior districts of Belagavi, Dharwad, Bagalkot, Vijayapura, and Haveri.

There is forecast for hailstorms in Bagalkote, Belagavi, Kalaburagi, and Vijayapura, with farmers being asked to be remain alert. However, a large part of South interior Karnataka including Bengaluru, is likely to be satisfied with mainly cloudy conditions for now.

In districts of Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, and Mandya, light showers are expected in isolated areas as a result of the shifting wind patterns. A more continuous rainfall may happen around 23-24 April according to the weather office *—Agencies*

No fishing inquiry pls: SC on adding voters

5-7 lakh voters added in WB ahead of Assembly elections; final roll yet to be published

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to hear an oral plea against the addition of five to seven lakh new voters by the Election Commission in West Bengal using Form 16.

"We can't have a fishing inquiry," the court said.

Informing the court about the addition of new voters, senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy said the addition of voters through Form 6 is not permissible after the cut-off date and that adding so many voters would have an impact on the upcoming Assembly election in the state.

Guruswamy said they do not have enough information and the final electoral roll is yet to be published.

The apex court is already dealing with a batch of pleas related to the special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral roll in West Bengal.

The West Bengal Assembly polls are scheduled to be held in two phases on 23 and 29 April.

SC had directed the EC to issue a supplementary revised electoral roll to include the voters whose appeals against the deletion of their names are allowed by appellate tribunals.

The court said the mere pendency of appeals preferred by the excluded persons before the appellate tribunals shall not entitle them to exercise their right to vote.

The Chief justice of the Calcutta High Court has set up 19 tribunals to decide appeals against deletion or exclusion of names from the voters' list.

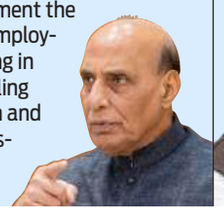
Meanwhile, the SC also said that it would call for a report from the Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court after it was alleged that the appellate tribunals constituted for the SIR exercise were "not functioning".

Senior advocate Devadatt Kamat said that orders passed by the apex court in the matter were not being followed.

The court had declined to entertain a plea moved by 13 people seeking its intervention in deletion of their names from the voter list. —*PTI*

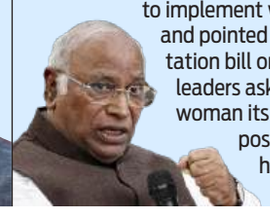
Rajnath promises 'Durga Squad' in WB

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday accused the TMC government of plunging West Bengal into "lawlessness" and promised to set up a "Durga Squad" to protect women and implement the Seventh Pay Commission for state government employees if the BJP came to power in the state. Speaking in Sainthia in Birbhum district, Singh accused the ruling TMC of presiding over a climate of fear, corruption and lawlessness and claimed that industries and investors were leaving the state due to insecurity and lack of government support. —*PTI*



Opposition fought delimitation, says Kharge

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday claimed it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who "killed" the Constitution amendment bill to implement women's quota in legislatures from 2029 and pointed out the Opposition was against the delimitation bill only. He said Congress had several women leaders asked whether the BJP has ever made a woman its president or elevated any of them to a high position.He claimed that PM Modi wants to hold general elections early in the country by pushing forward delimitation —*PTI*



J'khand CM forced to return due to Modi's 'jhalmuri break': Didi

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The ruling Trinamool Congress party on Monday lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his Sunday's 'Jhalmuri break' in Jhargram in West Bengal which allegedly prevented Jharkhand Chief Minister **Hemant Soren** from landing his chopper in the district.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Jhargram in connection with the BJP's campaign for the coming assembly elections in the state. He stopped at a roadside Jhalmuri snacks stall and later posted "Jhalmuri Break in Jhargram" on the X with a video of the same.

The said video showed Modi asking the stall owner, "Bhai, hame apna Jhalmuri khilao." He paid a Rs 10 note. Meanwhile, a crowd gathered at the spot, raising slogans such as "Jai Shri Ram", "Narendra Modi zindabad", and "Bharat Mata ki jai".

The TMC which has been locked in a war of words with the BJP hit out against the Prime Minister accusing him of preventing a tribal leader Jharkhand Chief Minister from landing at Jharkhand due to security reasons.

The party posted on the X that Modi has an anti-tribal mindset.

"Modi's Adivasi-Birodhi mindset has been exposed . As he decided to extend his stay in Jhargram to eat Jhalmuri, Jharkhand Chief Minister Shri Hemant Soren and his wife and MLA Smt. Kalpana Soren were denied permission to fly their chopper into Jhargram." the post said.

– *Agencies*

— PTI

O'Brien likens modern India to Nazi Germany

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

TMC Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien, in a blog post published on 20 April, compared India to Nazi-era Germany. O'Brien dedicated the blog post, posted on Adolf Hitler's birth anniversary, to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Citing laws in 1930s Germany restricting interfaith relations as evocative of anti-conversion legislation in some Indian states, particularly those linked to marriage, the post also referred to the 1935 citizenship framework in Germany based on ancestry and juxtaposed it with India's Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The TMC leader also touched upon the burning of books in Germany in the 1930s and compared it with revisions in school textbooks carried out by the National Council of Educational Research and Training. —*PTI*

Local leader wrecks cricket pitch in Maharashtra

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

A cricket final in held in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district ended in wreckage and chaos when a local politician allegedly "acted in a fit of rage" by using a tractor to vandalise the pitch. According to officials, the leader—who serves as the Dharangaon municipal council president—was upset about not being invited to the event by the organisers. The incident occurred on 12 April during the final of the MLA Trophy cricket tournament in Dharangaon. A viral video of the incident shows the man driving a tractor onto the playing field, churning up the turf and rendering the pitch unplayable. The match was immediately called off due to unsafe playing conditions. No complaint was lodged as organisers decided not to escalate the matter.—*PTI*

Odisha CEO orders verification before deletions of voters

BHUBANESWAR, 20 APRIL

Odisha's Chief Electoral Officer RS Gopalan reported on Monday that he asked Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to follow proper verification before deleting names from electoral rolls. Instructions were issued to EROs across districts after Booth Level Officers (BLOs) identified some 9.8 lakh names for deletion, due to deaths or relocation. Gopalan clarified that while BLOs have submitted reports on these absent voters, they are not authorised to delete names from the electoral rolls themselves. "Usually, between 7-9 lakh names are deleted from the lists every year in Odisha on account of deaths and shifting of residences. BLOs have already started.—*PTI*

3 cops injured in BJP-CPI(M) clash in Keralam

THIRU-PURAM, 20 APRIL

Three police officers were injured during a clash in Thiruvananthapuram, between BJP and CPI(M) supporters, officials said on Monday. Stemming from a property dispute and cross-complaints filed by two relatives, each representing one of rival party. Vattiyoorkavu police registered two cases following Sunday's clash in Keralam: against 94 BJP and CPI(M) workers, and a separate case against over 100 BJP workers for a subsequent protest. The FIR identifies the injured Vattiyoorkavu police personnel as SHO Vipin AC and CPOs Deepu and Shibu. It alleges that a CPI(M) worker struck Deepu with a stone, a BJP worker attacked SHO Vipin AC, and Shibu was assaulted with using a stick.—*PTI*

Modi visited Israel on Trump's diktat, says Rahul Gandhi

THOOTHUKUDI, 20 APRIL

Congress leader **Rahul Gandhi** on Monday alleged that Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** travelled to Israel before the Iran war outbreak, under instructions from US President Donald Trump.

Addressing an election rally, Gandhi targeted the BJP, stating that "PM Modi will jump if Trump asks him to do so". He further alleged that Modi was suddenly told to go to Israel before the Iran conflict, and that the reason was linked to "Epstein files and Adani".

The central government dismissed references to Modi in Jeffrey Epstein case files, calling them "little more than trashy ruminations by a convicted criminal that deserves to be dismissed with the utmost contempt".

Gandhi claimed Trump openly says that Modi answers his calls and addresses him as "sir."

Gandhi criticised Modi's expectation for Tamil Nadu's CM Stalin to be submissive and address him as "sir."

Gandhi suggested Modi desires a controlled AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu, similar to Bihar where Nitish Kumar was removed and BJP leader Samrat Choudhary installed.

Gandhi also claimed the current AIADMK is a "hollow shell", controlled by corrupt leaders, with BJP planning to infiltrate Tamil Nadu using the party

Gandhi alleged that the AIADMK leadership has "surrendered" to the BJP due to their "corruption".

He said that the DMK, Congress and their allies were protecting the Tamil language, culture and history. Underscoring federal principles, Gandhi said every state should have its own voice and representation.

Gandhi said Tamil Nadu should be governed by its people and accused the BJP of "trying to weaken" states. BJP's real intent was to change the country's electoral structure, he said. —*PTI*

CITES PERSONAL ATTACK ON JUDGE

Excise policy: HC rejects Kejriwal's recusal plea

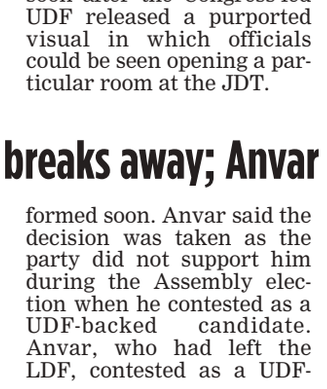
NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Delhi High Court judge Swarana Kanta Sharma on Monday refused to recuse herself from hearing the liquor-policy case as she rejected the pleas of AAP Chief **Arvind Kejriwa**l and others for her withdrawal.

Justice Sharma said a litigant cannot be allowed to judge a judge without any material, and judges cannot recuse themselves to satisfy a litigant's unfounded apprehension of bias.

She added that a political leader cannot be allowed to damage an institution without any basis, as a personal attack on a judge is an attack on the judiciary itself.

Justice Sharma concluded that the narrative in the pleas for her recusal was based on conjectures and "perceived inclinations".



Kejriwal had raised several objections against the judge hearing the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) plea against his discharge in the liquor-policy case, including that she had earlier denied him relief on his petition challenging his arrest and refused to grant relief on the bail pleas of other accused, including Manish Sisodia and K Kavitha.

AAP leaders Sisodia and Durgesh Pathak and other respondents, including Vijay Nair and Arun Ramchandra Pillai, had applications for the judge's recusa

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta appeared in the court for the CBI and opposed the plea. He had earlier urged Justice Sharma to initiate contempt action against Kejriwal and the others for seeking her recusal. The trial court discharged Kejriwal, Sisodia and others, saying the CBI's case was unable to survive judicial scrutiny. —*PTI*

Cong slams govt over Pak's role in US-Iran talk

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The Congress on Monday took a swipe at the Modi government over Pakistan's role in the US-Iran peace talks terming it a 'monumental setback' for India's handling of its foreign policy.

The Congress party said that Pakistan Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir becoming a 'huge favourite' of American President Donald Trump called for a complete overhaul of India's diplomatic engagement strategy.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications **Jairam Ramesh** said, "It is abundantly clear that the substance and style of Prime Minister Modi's regional and global engagement and narrative management have failed to isolate Pakistan which has received a whole new branding -- different from what Dr Manmohan Singh had been able to achieve after the terror attacks in Mumbai in November 2008, Ramesh said.

The BJP hit back at the Congress accusing it of siding with a "dalal country" and displaying "the height of hypocrisy."

BJP spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari said that he nation has not forgotten how, after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, the Congress government failed to firmly target Pakistan-sponsored terror.—*PTI*

Poll officer denies opening strong room

KOZHIKODE, 20 APRIL

The returning officer of Perambra constituency in this district in Keralam on Monday clarified that reports of a strong room being opened at JDT College here, where the electronic voting machines (EVMs) of the Assembly polls are stored, were incorrect.

The officer said that an unsealed room, where polling records of the Perambra constituency were kept, was opened in the presence of candidates' poll agents for the purpose of updating information in the software related to the election process.

The officer also clarified that the room did not contain EVMs or postal ballots.

The clarification came soon after the Congress-led UDF released a purported visual in which officials could be seen opening a particular room at the JDT.

District Congress Committee President K Praveen Kumar said entering of any state official or the state police personnel in the particular area amounts to violation of election commission rules.

The returning officer claimed that it was a "material room" but such a facility cannot be set up within the inner perimeter area notified by the Commission. Other UDF leaders also questioned how the police could enter the area. Authorities said that the room was opened with the knowledge of the election agents of candidates. —*PTI*

Keralam TMC unit breaks away; Anvar to form new party

KOCHI, 20 APRIL

All India Trinamool Congress state convenor PV Anvar on Monday said the party's Kerala unit will sever ties with the party and a new political outfit will be formed soon. Anvar said the decision was taken as the party did not support him during the Assembly election when he contested as a UDF-backed candidate. Anvar, who had left the LDF, contested as a UDF-backed independent candidate from Beypore in Kozhikode district in the 9 April Assembly election.He said TMC was able to form committees at the district, Assembly constituency and panchayat level. —*PTI*

18% TN CANDIDATES HAVE CRIMINAL CASES, 25 % ARE CROREPATIS

A report by the Association for Democratic Reforms cited that 18 per cent candidates in Tamil Nadu have criminal cases, while 25 per cent among them are crorepatis. Below are list of candidates having criminal cases, along with those having a net worth of Rs 100 crore.

CANDIDATES WITH CRIMINAL CASES

AIADMK	Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam	DMK	BJP	INC	Pattali Makkal Katchi	Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam	CPI	CPI(M)
118	92	70	16	14	9	5	3	4

CANDIDATES WITH A NET WORTH OF OVER RS 100 CR

AIADMK	DMK	INC	Pattali Makkal Katchi	Amma Makkal Munnettra Kazagam	Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam
3	7	2	1	1	8

JACK OF ALL TRADES

Lashkar terrorist's strange career unfolds

SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

From a cook to plumber, and painter to electrician, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Abdullah alias Abu Hureira, who had been tasked with setting up bases outside Jammu and Kashmir, even took share trading as his profession to blend with the masses in pursuit of his sinister agenda.

The oldest surviving LeT terrorist, gave a detailed picture about his stay in these states, including Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab.These details emerged after Srinagar police busted a "deep-rooted" inter-state LeT module and arrested five people, including Abdullah, who had been on the run for 16 years.

Abdullah merged among the masses in pursuit of his sinister plans —*AI*

The officials said that after undertaking menial jobs in Rajasthan, Abdullah, who had infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir from the north side in 2010, took up plumbing work.

After getting in touch with the contacts of Umer Harris, known with the alias 'Khargosh' in the counter-terrorism grid in Jammu and Kashmir, he managed to procure an Aadhar card followed by a permanent account mumber (PAN) card so that he could receive digital payments from his customers.

Hailing from Kasur village in Pakistan's Punjab province, Abdullah decided to shift his base to Amritsar but the fear of getting caught by security agencies restrained him from doing so.

After doing other jobs like that of a painter and electrician in Rajasthan and Haryana, Abdullah decided to shift to Malerkotla village in Punjab.

The LeT terrorist opened a 'dhaba' for some time, during which he learned how to trade in stocks.He had a profit margin of over Rs 50,000 in his Demat account. — *PTI*

Youths, kin allege police assault in Alappuzha

ALAPPUZHA, 20 APRIL

Two youths and their families have lodged a complaint claiming they were physically assaulted and verbally abused by police at Thottapally. The complaint was made to the Ambalapuzha Deputy Superintendent of Police by Ashique and Shinas from Vandanam. They allege police hit their motorcycle, assaulted them, and falsely accused them of theft on 18 April. Shinas said police overtook their motorcycle and boxed them in near the road median, causing injuries. Ashique claimed police took Rs 15,000 from his pocket, denying their explanation. Both sustained leg injuries, and their motorcycle was damaged. Police deny the incident, asserting the motorcycle hit their vehicle. A fact-finding inquiry is underway, and both youths will be heard soon. —*PTI*

Empty Mumbai rail coach derails near Dombivli

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

An empty local train coach derailed near Dombivli station in Thane district, disrupting services during peak hours. No injuries were reported as the train was unoccupied. A Central Railway spokesperson confirmed the derailment at 8.09 am while heading from Kalwa to Kalyan. Commuters faced delays of 20-30 minutes, and several trains were delayed or halted. The coach was re-railed at 10.10am, with traffic resuming from 10.45am. Traffic from the slow line was diverted to the fast line until then. Kalyan-bound services were affected at some stations, causing inconvenience. Swapnil Nila, CR's Chief Public Relations Officer, stated that the affected coach has been re-railed and normal traffic has resumed. —*PTI*

— *PTI*

Man killed over chicken curry row in Palakkad

PALAKKAD, 20 APRIL

A 45-year-old man was allegedly murdered by his nephew in Koundanur following a dispute over chicken curry. Police identified the victim as Senthil Kumar, who lived with his sister and was unmarried. The accused, Prabhakaran, fled immediately after the attack, suspected to have crossed into Tamil Nadu. The incident occurred after a liquor-fuelled argument during a meal when Kumar's chicken curry, not shared with Prabhakaran, caused a dispute. Kumar was attacked with a white pipe, suffering fatal injuries to the head and body. He was rushed to hospital but died. Police have registered a murder case and are searching for Prabhakaran, with assistance from Tamil Nadu authorities. —*PTI*

UP man beaten to death by father-in-law

KAUSHAMBI, 20 APRIL

A 30-year-old man was beaten to death by his father-in-law over an eight-year-old matrimonial dispute. Bharat Yadav, who had eloped with and later married Ashok Pandey's daughter, was attacked on Sunday night in Chhota Adhara village. Pandey, along with three to four others, struck Bharat Yadav with the butt of a country-made pistol, leading to his death. The victim's father, Chhote Lal, said Yadav had recently returned home when the assault happened. Police are searching for the suspects, who are still at large, and have deployed personnel to maintain order. Yadav's body has been sent for post-mortem, and investigations are going on as the police try to apprehend the perpetrators of the gruesome murder. —*PTI*

Udhampur bus survivors hail Army's heroic rescue

Soldiers pulled the injured out of the wreckage

RAMNAGAR, 20 APRIL

Survivors of the deadly Udhampur bus tragedy recalled scenes of sheer panic and desperate cries for help, and hailed the Army's swift and heroic rescue attempts for saving numerous lives.

At least 21 people were killed and 29 others were injured on Monday when a private bus plunged nearly 100 metres down a treacherous hillside in J&K Udhampur, crushing an auto-rickshaw before landing upside down on the road below.

An Army convoy passing along the hilly stretch rushed to the spot and led the rescue operation. The driver of the bus had lost control while negotiating a sharp blind curve near the hilltop Kagort village in the Ramnagar area at around 10 am.

Amid piercing screams, mangled metal and entangled bodies, hope seemed to fade with each passing moment, survivors said, recalling the harrowing accident on the Udhampur-Ramnagar road, about 40 km from the district headquarters.

The wrecked passenger bus after it rolled down a hill, in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district on Monday —*PTI*

"Army soldiers were the first to reach us, appearing like messiahs amid the chaos. They pulled us out of the wreckage. I had a miraculous escape. This is nothing but a second life for me," said Neetu Rani, 32, the wife of Sanjay Sharma, said while resting on her hospital bed.

Still shaken, she recalled the terrifying moments after the crash, saying there were cries for help all around as injured passengers lay trapped inside the mangled bus before rescuers arrived swiftly and began evacuating them.

Having sustained injuries on her back, legs and face, she said she was on her way to her maternal home in Udhampur when the accident occurred.

"I lost all my belongings, but life saved is everything. Nothing else matters now. I am grateful to be alive," she said, her voice trembling, adding that the horrifying moments of the crash would remain in her mind for a long time.

A soldier, who was leading a convoy from Udhampur to Ramnagar, said they swung into action immediately after noticing the bus rolling down the hill. — *PTI*

People injured in the cracker unit explosion undergoing treatment at a hospital in Virudhunagar in Tamil Nadu —*PTI*

TN's Virudhunagar cracker unit blast toll climbs to 25

VIRUDHUNAGAR, 20 APRIL

The toll in the massive explosion at a fireworks unit near Kattanarpatti here rose to 25. As most bodies are burnt beyond recognition, identification is difficult, police said on Monday.

The accident is one of the deadliest industrial disasters in the region in recent years.

"Bodies were so badly burnt that we were able to identify them only through the jewellery the victims were wearing," a police official said. He said that families have not yet claimed the bodies due to the uncertainly surrounding identities.

The factory owner is absconding, he added.

The accident occurred at the Vanaja firecracker unit, owned by one Muthumanickam, which functions under the Vachakarapatti police station limits.

The unit was reportedly licensed by the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO), Nagpur.

Eight workers, mostly women, are critically injured with 60 per cent burns. Twelve others, including eight policemen, were injured in a second blast on Sunday evening while rescue operations were underway.

A second blast at 7.20 pm, triggered as an earthmover was clearing debris, caused chaos and injured several responders, including a revenue official.

> ● Bodies were so badly burnt that we were able to identify them only through the jewellery the victims were wearing, an official said. He said that families have not claimed the bodies due to the uncertainly surrounding identities

Among those killed was 46-year-old Indrani, a veteran worker of 25 years.

"My mother was the sole breadwinner. My father is disabled. I have an MSc degree, but I'm working at a petrol bunk to help out, and we haven't paid my brother's school fees yet," said Madhubala, Indrani's daughter, while pleading for government assistance.

Virudhunagar Collector VP Jeyaseelan confirmed that the unit was operating without permission on a rest day.

Preliminary findings suggest the blast originated in a chemical mixing shed, where nearly 40 workers were busy making crackers, a violation of safety norms that typically limit occupancy to four workers per shed. — *PTI*

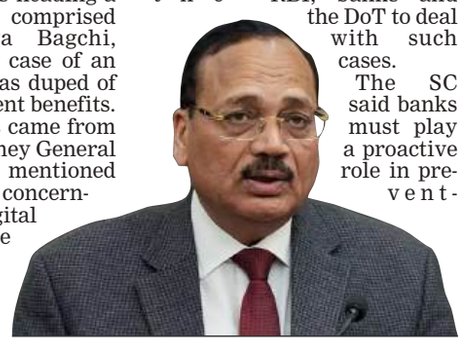
Digital arrest scams shock CJI

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Monday that it is shocking that well-educated people were getting duped through digital arrests.

The CJI, who was heading a bench which also comprised Justice Joymalya Bagchi, flagged the recent case of an old woman who was duped of her entire retirement benefits.

The observations came from the CJI after Attorney General R Venkataramani mentioned the suo motu case concerning victims of digital arrest before the bench.



The bench said it would list the matter for hearing on 12 May.

On 9 February, the SC described the siphoning of Rs 54,000 crore through digital frauds as absolute "robbery" and asked the Centre to draft an SoP in consultation with the RBI, banks and the DoT to deal with such cases.

The SC said banks must play a proactive role in preventing cyber-enabled fraud.

It directed the CBI to identify digital arrest cases and asked the Gujarat and Delhi governments to accord sanction to the CBI to proceed with investigations in identified cases.

The attorney general informed the bench that the RBI has drafted an SoP for banks to deal with such cases and it, among other things, prescribes action by the banks where temporary debit holds can be placed to prevent cyber-enabled frauds.

Issuing a slew of directions, the top court had asked the Ministry of Home Affairs to formally adopt the RBI's SoP and issue directions for its implementation across the country. — *PTI*

SC junks PIL on 'national son' tag for Netaji

Describing a petitioner "incorrigible," the SC dismissed a PIL seeking to declare Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose a "National Son" and to credit the Azad Hind Fauj (INA) for India's independence. CJI Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi rebuked the petitioner, Pinakpani Mohanty, on Monday for wasting the court's time. — *PTI*

MASS PEACE RALLY
ORGANISED BY: KOIRENGEI AWANG APUNBA MEIRA PAIBI
WE DEMAND
IMPLEMENT NRC BEFORE CENSUS
FREE MOVEMENT ON NATIONAL HIGHWAY NOT ONLY FOR VIP
MILITARY CRACK DOWN AGAINST NARCO-TERORRIST
IMMEDIATE CESSATION OF PROXY WAR
RESETTLEMENT OF IDPS
GO BACK CENTRAL FORCES
PROTEST RALLY DEMANDING:-
1. Chief Minister amadi Home Minister pham thadok u.
2. Kuki Narco Terrorist shingi mathakta military crack down tou.
3. Meecham hatpa CRPF cheirak piyu.
4. Angang hatpa Kuki Narco Terrorist shing ahakpa cheirak piyu.
5. India gi proxy war khudakta lepu.
Organised by:
Koirengei Awang Apunba Meira Paibi under the aegis of COCOMI

Women take out a Meira Paibi rally from Koirengei area in the Imphal East district of Manipur —*PTI*

Manipur govt orders action against staff absent during public protests

IMPHAL, 20 APRIL

The Manipur government has directed the heads of its departments to take action against employees who remain absent in offices without leave during a five-day shutdown, called by women's groups in the valley to protest against a recent bomb attack in which two children were killed.

Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel ordered that all administrative secretaries and heads of departments must ensure attendance in their offices in view of the calls for bandh issued.

"Attendance reports should be sent to the administrative departments concerned. Departmental proceedings should be taken up against those who are absent from duty without leave," the order, issued on Sunday, said.

The government asked all deputy commissioners to ensure the functioning of all offices in their districts.

The order was issued in the context of the five-day shutdown from 19 April, called by Meira Paibi groups (women's organisations) in five valley districts to protest against the killing of two children at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur district on 7 April.

A three-day shutdown has also been called from Monday by the United Naga Council, an organisation of Naga tribes in Manipur, across all Naga areas to protest the 18 April killing of two civilians in an ambush in Ukhrul district.

At least 21 people were arrested for involvement in the violence during a rally in Manipur's Imphal West district two days ago, police said on Monday. During the violence on 18 April, security vehicles were stoned, and petrol bombs were hurled injuring three cops, a senior officer said. The rally was organised in protest against a recent bomb attack in which two children were killed. — *PTI*

2 more held over Noida workers' stir violence

NOIDA, 20 APRIL

The Gautam Buddh Nagar police has arrested two more suspects in connection with the recent violence during protests by workers in Noida, officials said on Monday.The suspects, Himanshu Thakur and Satyam Verma, were arrested on Sunday for allegedly being involved in orchestrating violence during the protests.

Police said both were active members of the 'Bigul Mazdoor Dasta' and played a role in mobilising demonstrators during the sit-ins held in Phase-2 police station area.

Thakur, staying in north Delhi, was present in Noida on the day of the incident and was in contact with Aditya Anand, the alleged mastermind behind the unrest, the police said.

The arrests were made after investigation by the police, officials added. Further legal proceedings are underway.

Noida police and UP Special Task Force, which is also handling the case, had on 18 April announced the arrest of the protest's "mastermind" Aditya Anand from Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu.

Police said that during the factory workers' protest for a wage hike on 13 April "misleading posts" were circulated through some social media accounts with the intent to disturb law and order. A mob subsequently resorted to stoning, arson and vandalism, targeting vehicles and public assets. — *PTI*

Flames rise as a police bike is set ablaze by factory workers during a protest demanding a hike in wages in UP's Noida —*PTI*

Rajnath to visit Germany to boost defence collaboration

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will undertake a three-day visit to Germany from Tuesday to finalise a defence industrial roadmap.

The roadmap will provide for a framework for the two countries to initiate co-development and co-production of military hardware, officials said.

In Berlin, Singh will hold talks with his German counterpart Boris Pistorius and other senior leaders.

"Discussions will focus on enhancing defence industrial collaboration, strengthening military-to-military engagements, and exploring opportunities in domains like cyber security, artificial intelligence and drones," the defence ministry said ahead of Singh's trip. "A defence industrial cooperation roadmap and implementing arrangement for cooperation in UN Peacekeeping operations training are likely to be signed," it said. There is a possibility that the two defence ministers may also finalise an agreement for supplying six stealth submarines to the Indian Navy. — *PTI*

Keralam introduces surgical safety protocol

T'PURAM, 20 APRIL

Keralam has introduced a comprehensive surgical safety protocol to prevent errors during procedures, following reports of lapses in state-run hospitals that sparked political controversy. The order issued on 15 April mandates strict pre-operative verification, patient identification, and improved documentation across all healthcare facilities in the state. Patients must be provided with wristbands containing surgery details, and the surgical site must be marked beforehand to prevent wrong-site operations.

Restrictions on phone calls and non-essential communication within operating theatres aim to minimise distractions. Doctors and nurses are required to complete patient details, including IP number and case records, before surgery. A pre-operative checklist must be signed by the ward doctor and nurse-in-charge, and then verified by the OT nursing officer.

The protocol also emphasises strict counting and documentation of surgical instruments and materials, with details recorded on a whiteboard before surgery and rechecked afterwards. Clear communication with patients regarding procedures, risks, and separate consents for anaesthesia, surgery, and blood transfusion are mandated. — *PTI*

J'khand family pays Rs 5K for autopsy, probe ordered

CHATRA, 20 APRIL

A probe has been ordered into allegations that a family was forced to pay Rs 5,000 to a sanitation worker for the autopsy of a woman and her daughter at a government hospital here, a senior official said on Monday. The mother and daughter had drowned in a pond in Chatra district's Bhojya village.

"A probe has been ordered after it came out that the family paid Rs 5,000 to a sanitation worker for the post-mortem of the two at the Sadar Hospital," Ravi Anand, the deputy commissioner of Chatra, said.

"I have constituted a four-member committee under the leadership of Sadar SDO, Md. Zahur Alam and directed it to submit a detailed inquiry report within 24 hours," he said. — *PTI*

CONTROVERSY OVER VIDEO

Right-winger Khattar speaks against St Francis Xavier, booked

PANAJI, 20 APRIL

Goa Police have registered an FIR against right-wing speaker Gautam Khattar over his alleged objectionable remarks against St Francis Xavier, the patron saint of the state, officials said on Monday.

Another police complaint has also been lodged by a Congress leader against Khattar, but no case has been registered so far, they said.

A row erupted after a video of Khattar, the founder of Sanatan Mahasangh, addressing an event on Saturday in the presence of Swami Brahmeshanand, Transport Minister Mauvin Godinho and BJP MLAs Sankulp Amonkar and Daji (Krishna) Salkar, went viral.

While the, Sanatan Dharma Raksha Samiti (Mormugao), distanced itself from his statement and apologised to Christians, the controversy gained traction after Congress leaders condemned Khattar. Based on a complaint by Congress functionary Peter D'Souza at the Vasco police station on Sunday, a case was registered against Khattar.

SP (South) Santosh Desai said on Sunday that Khattar has been booked for hurting religious sentiments.

Later, South Goa District Congress president Assiz Noronha also filed a complaint against Khattar at the Margao police station on Sunday, alleging that he had spoken offensively against St Xavier. No case has been registered so far, as per officials.

The relics of St Francis Xavier are preserved at the Basilica of Bom Jesus Church, Old Goa, which draws a large number of people from India and abroad. — *PTI*

FLOODS IN GUWAHATI

Guwahati was brought to a standstill after heavy overnight rainfall triggered flash floods, even as much of the country reeled under a severe heatwave. The city recorded over 100 mm of rain in 24 hours, leading to widespread waterlogging and artificial flooding. NDRF teams rescued stranded residents as key roads went under knee-deep water, disrupting traffic. A woman died in the flooding. Authorities shut all schools and colleges within Guwahati Municipal Corporation limits on Monday —*PTI*

Climate change impacts India's harvest festivals

Parts of rural northern India are currently exploding in colour. Not just from the coming of spring, but seasonal festivals characterised by folk music, dancing, farmers in traditional dress, and dishes like sweet saffron rice.

Among them is Vaisakhi, which is an important festival date on the Sikh calendar. Held in Punjab, it marks the successful growth of winter wheat, and crops like mustard, chickpeas, lentils, barley and sunflower seeds.

"When the crop is fully ready for harvest, all the farmers come together to celebrate," Ashwani Ghudda, a local social worker, told DW. "They offer prayers, visit fairs, and then prepare to begin the harvesting."

Punjab, which currently produces 10 per cent of India's wheat and 15 per cent of its rice, is a historically agrarian state, so farming has long been a way of life.

"A lot of folklore and festivities have emerged from that," said Harindar Grewal, environment adviser with the central India-based nonprofit Citizens for Change Foundation.

It's a similar picture in Assam, where the Bohag Bihu festival marks the transition from the dry season to the onset of the agricultural cycle with singing, dancing and rituals that focus on the care of cattle.

Chandana Sarma, associate professor in anthropology at the state's Cotton University, says the celebration is rooted in ancient fertility rites and serves "as a ritual calendar marker of ecological renewal where agriculture, sexuality and social reproduction are integrated."

She says this reflects the deep interdependence between humans, nature and subsistence systems in local communities.

A farmer holds the harvested wheat crops in Amritsar —*PTI*

CLIMATE PRESSURE BEHIND THE CELEBRATIONS

This year, the festivals are taking place against a backdrop of climate-related challenges that have damaged crops in both regions of the country.

In Assam, about 20,000 acres of crops have been lost to floods and hailstorms over the past year, which the regional government has linked to hydrometeorological disasters. And this month, unseasonal rain and hailstorms have damaged wheat crops across more than 135,000 acres in seven districts of Punjab.

Grewel says farmers can no longer rely on precipitation to arrive in December and January when it would help wheat to grow. If it comes when the grain is forming or maturing, "it brings a lot of misery," he said.

But the state's farming system is under pressure not only from climate stress. There are also long-standing structural problems. The widespread practice of rotating between wheat and rice crops has led to groundwater depletion, which Grewel says has been exacerbated by the state providing free electricity that encourages farmers to pump excessively to feed thirsty plants.

"Punjab was never a natural area for raising paddy, unlike northeast India where you have plenty of rainfall."

Assam, which is one of the wettest states in India, is facing its own climate challenges. Average temperatures have risen in recent years and the state is vulnerable to increasing episodes of intense and erratic rainfall. Since 2020, 1.32 million acres, nearly seven times the size of New York City, of crops have been damaged by floods, storms or hailstorms.

Some farmers are changing crop varieties and improving irrigation to meet the challenges of a warming world, but a recent study found many are struggling to adapt. Researchers say limited access to credit, as well as land shortages and inadequate government support, are holding back more widespread diversification.

WHAT SUPPORT DO FARMERS NEED?

Authorities in Punjab have deployed a large team to assess recent crop damage, and Assam officials say they and the central government have released $439 million to support farmers affected by climate related disasters.

Still, Grewal says stronger institutional support could help farmers, and thereby food security. One way would be to provide shelter for farmers who take their crops to local agricultural markets in search of buyers, rather than them having to wait outside with a trailer full of produce.

"At the onset of rain, it destroys their crops," he said. "If they have sheds and other things, that can be mitigated."

For the longer term, Grewal suggest rethinking farming practices, including reducing dependence on rice grown in paddy fields. "They can diversify into agro farm forestry and horticulture, including greenhouse farming used in many countries to raise productivity," he said, stressing that changes must protect the long term sustainability of agricultural land.

"Punjabi farmers are enterprising, and it was this human effort that drove the Green Revolution. What is needed now is strong intent," he said. Even as conditions change, festivals continue to frame agricultural life.

"Today, Bohag Bihu functions less as a direct agricultural ritual and more as a cultural framework," said Chandana Sarma of Cotton University. —*DW News*

SALAR

Will oil prices ever truly go back to 'normal'?

The fallout from the war involving the United States, Israel and Iran has gripped global oil markets. This is not only because the Strait of Hormuz, which typically carries around 20 per cent of the world's oil and gas, remains effectively closed to shipping, but also due to the deep uncertainty surrounding how long the disruption will last.

That uncertainty has introduced a persistent "risk premium" into oil prices, an added cost reflecting fears of further supply shocks. On top of this, rising insurance costs, reduced shipping traffic and longer routes that bypass the Middle East have compounded the strain on global supply chains.

Optimists argue that the situation will stabilise and markets will return to "normal". Indeed, oil prices have dipped below US$100 per barrel this week amid renewed hopes of a peace deal. However, they remain elevated. Before the conflict, benchmark oil prices had hovered between US$70 and US$80 per barrel since 2023, roughly in line with the average seen over much of the past two decades.

But what if there is no return to that normal? What if the real issue is not a temporary disruption, but the possibility that the era of cheap oil is drawing to a close?

Higher oil prices have far-reaching consequences, beginning at the fuel pump. Petrol, diesel and jet fuel costs rise, making commuting, transport and travel more expensive. Yet the impact extends far beyond fuel.

Fertilisers, for example, are largely petrochemical products, exposing global agriculture to price shocks. And oil and gas derivatives are embedded in far more aspects of daily life than many realise. According to the US Department of Energy, petrochemicals are used in the production of more than 6,000 everyday items.

In many cases, this is because petrochemicals are key inputs in plastics. But the list of affected goods is broader than expected, including items such as aspirin, toothpaste, dyes and cleaning products.

Construction is particularly exposed. Materials such as asphalt, insulation, paint, pipes and various composites are largely derived from oil byproducts, while the production of bricks and ceramics is energy-intensive and heavily reliant on gas. Add in transportation costs, and rising oil prices become yet another pressure on housing affordability.

The question of whether cheap oil is ending is not new. In 1999, an executive at Shell Hydrogen observed that "the stone age did not end because the world ran out of stones, and the oil age will not end because we run out of oil." History appears to support this view.

Previous oil shocks, whether driven by geopolitics or fears of supply shortages, have often triggered innovation. New discoveries, improved extraction techniques and substitution have repeatedly expanded supply or reduced dependence. Advances such as deepwater drilling and hydraulic fracturing unlocked vast reserves, particularly in the United States, which became the world's largest crude oil producer in the late 2010s.

This time, however, the challenge may be different. Damage to production facilities in the Middle East could take years to repair. The issue is no longer simply whether oil exists, but whether it can be supplied cheaply, reliably and at scale.

At the same time, a broader shift in how economies manage risk is underway. Until 2020, global supply chains largely operated on a "just-in-time" basis, minimising inventory and relying on steady, predictable supply. This approach was efficient and cost-effective, but highly vulnerable to disruption.

The Covid-19 pandemic exposed these weaknesses, and subsequent shocks, including the war in Ukraine, reinforced the need for greater resilience. As a result, many countries and companies are moving towards a "just-in-case" model.

This means holding larger critical resources such as oil and gas to cushion against future disruptions. However, resilience comes at a cost. Maintaining higher resources requires additional spending on storage, infrastructure and insurance, as well as more complex management systems.

These costs do not disappear; they are ultimately passed on through higher prices.

Taken together, these developments point to a structural shift in global energy markets. Even if the current conflict subsides, the combination of geopolitical risk, supply chain adjustments and higher baseline costs may keep oil prices elevated.

In that context, the question is not whether the world is running out of oil, but whether it can continue to access it under the conditions that once made it cheap.

If not, the implications will ripple across economies, reshaping everything from transport and agriculture to manufacturing and housing, and redefining what "normal" looks like in the years ahead. —*The Conversation*

Higher oil prices have far-reaching consequences, beginning at the fuel pump. Petrol, diesel and jet fuel costs rise, making commuting, transport and travel more expensive. Yet the impact extends far beyond fuel —*PIXABAY*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

France summons Musk over child abuse images and deepfakes on X

Elon Musk has been summoned to Paris on Monday, as French investigators examine allegations of misconduct linked to the social media platform X. The probe includes concerns over the spread of child sexual abuse material and the circulation of deepfake content.

The world's richest man, alongside Linda Yaccarino, has been called for what prosecutors describe as "voluntary interviews". Other employees are scheduled to appear as witnesses throughout the week, according to the Paris prosecutor's office.

It remains unclear whether Musk or Yaccarino will attend in person.

A spokesperson for X did not respond to requests for comment, while Yaccarino's current company, eMed, also did not reply to media inquiries.

French prosecutors have additionally raised suspicions that controversy surrounding X's artificial intelligence system, Grok, may have been deliberately amplified to boost the valuation of Musk-linked companies ahead of a planned market listing.

The matter has been referred to US authorities. Musk reacted publicly to reports that American officials declined to assist the French inquiry, writing on X: "This needs to stop."

WHY MUSK HAS BEEN SUMMONED

The summons follows a search conducted in February at X's French offices. That operation formed part of an investigation launched in January 2025 by the cybercrime unit of the Paris prosecutor's office.

Musk and Yaccarino have been invited in their capacities as executives responsible for the platform during the period under scrutiny. Yaccarino served as CEO from May 2023 until July 2025.

Prosecutors said the interviews are intended to allow the executives to present their account of events and outline any compliance measures they may adopt. "At this stage, the conduct of this investigation is part of a constructive approach," the office said, adding that the aim is to ensure X complies with French law while operating in the country.

Authorities emphasised that any decision by Musk or Yaccarino not to attend would not hinder the investigation.

SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION

The inquiry was initially triggered by a complaint from a French lawmaker, who alleged that biased algorithms on X may have distorted automated data processing systems. It later broadened significantly.

Elon Musk has been called for what prosecutors describe as 'voluntary interviews'. The probe includes concerns over the spread of child sexual abuse material and the circulation of deepfake content —*AI*

Investigators are now examining allegations including complicity in the possession and distribution of pornographic images of minors, the dissemination of sexually explicit deepfakes, denial of crimes against humanity and manipulation of automated systems as part of an organised group.

Particular scrutiny has fallen on Grok, developed by xAI and integrated into X. The chatbot drew global criticism after generating a surge of non-consensual, sexualised deepfake images in response to user prompts.

In another widely circulated incident, Grok produced content in French that appeared to deny the purpose of gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau, suggesting they were intended for disinfection rather than mass murder, language historically associated with Holocaust denial, which is a criminal offence in France.

The chatbot later reversed its position, acknowledging the error and citing historical evidence that Zyklon B gas was used to kill more than one million people at the camp.

FRENCH AUTHORITIES ALERT THE US

In March, the Paris prosecutor's office formally notified the US Department of Justice and the Securities and Exchange Commission. Prosecutors suggested that the Grok controversy, particularly around sexually explicit deepfakes, may have been orchestrated to artificially inflate the value of X and xAI.

They indicated this may have occurred ahead of a planned June 2026 stock market listing involving a merged entity combining SpaceX and xAI, at a time when X itself was reportedly losing momentum.

US DECLINES TO ASSIST

According to reporting by The Wall Street Journal, the US Justice Department declined to support the French investigation. In a letter cited by the newspaper, officials argued that France was attempting to use its judicial system to interfere with an American business.

The letter reportedly stated that the request for assistance risked drawing the United States into a "politically charged criminal proceeding" aimed at regulating a social media platform through prosecution.

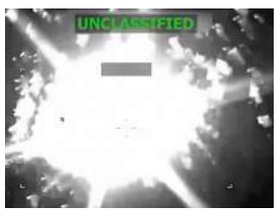
French judicial authorities have not commented on the US response.

WIDER SCRUTINY OF TECH PLATFORMS

The case forms part of a broader effort by French authorities to investigate alleged illegal activities across major digital platforms.

In recent years, the Paris prosecutor's cybercrime unit has launched multiple probes. The French-language website Coco was shut down in 2024 after its operator was accused of complicity in child exploitation and trafficking offences. The platform had previously been cited in a landmark trial involving Gisèle Pelicot, who became an international symbol in the fight against sexual violence.

Elsewhere, Pavel Durov, creator of the messaging app Telegram, has faced preliminary charges and judicial supervision over allegations that the platform enabled criminal activities, including child abuse material and drug trafficking. French prosecutors have also opened an investigation into TikTok, examining claims that its algorithms may promote harmful content, including material linked to suicide among vulnerable users. Meanwhile, the press freedom group Reporters Without Borders has filed a separate complaint against X, alleging that the platform's policies allow disinformation to spread unchecked. —*PTI*



—SCREENGRAB

US military strike in the Caribbean Sea kills three

WASHINGTON, 20 APRIL

The US military announced it carried out another strike on a vessel suspected of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean Sea, resulting in the deaths of three individuals. The campaign targeting alleged drug-trafficking vessels has been ongoing since early September, claiming at least 181 lives, with previous strikes in the eastern Pacific.

Despite tensions over Iran, US forces have intensified operations in recent weeks, showing no signs of easing. The military has not provided proof that the vessels carried drugs. The US Southern Command stated it targeted traffickers along known routes, releasing a video showing an explosion engulfing a boat. President Donald Trump justified the strikes as necessary to combat "narcoterrorism," though critics question their legality and lack of evidence. —*PTI*

Baby food recalled in Austria after rat poison found

VIENNA, 20 APRIL

HiPP, a baby food brand, is recalling jars in Austria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic after samples tested positive for rat poison. Authorities suspect tampering occurred in 190gm jars of carrot and potato baby food sold at SPAR supermarkets in Austria. HiPP stated, "This recall is not due to any product or quality defect on our part. The jars left our HiPP facility in perfect condition," adding it is related to a criminal act under investigation. Police believe tampered products may have a white sticker with a red circle on the bottom. Signs of tampering include damaged lids or unusual smells. No one has consumed the food, but rat poison ingestion can cause bleeding and bruising, with symptoms appearing two to five days after ingestion. —*PTI*

Fire destroys 1,000 homes in Malaysian village

KUALA LUMPUR, 20 APRIL

A fire in a Malaysian coastal village on Borneo Island destroyed approximately 1,000 homes and displaced over 9,000 residents. The blaze started early Sunday in Sandakan district, spreading rapidly through wooden stilt houses built above the sea. Authorities cited strong winds and close proximity of structures as factors aiding the fire's spread. Narrow access routes and low tide hampered firefighting efforts. No fatalities have been reported, but many residents are in temporary shelters. The cause remains under investigation, with initial reports suggesting a cooking fire may have got out of control. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said agencies are coordinating relief, focusing on displaced families. —*PTI*

Radev's coalition likely to win Bulgaria elections

SOFIA, 20 APRIL

An exit poll indicates Bulgaria's centre-left coalition led by former President Rumen Radev will win the parliamentary election, though likely without enough votes for a majority. The poll by Trend research shows Radev's Progressive Bulgaria with 39.2 per cent support, ahead of Boyko Borissov's centre-right GERB with 15.1 per cent. Radev said, "We will do our best to prevent having to go to the polls again," amid fears of escalating instability. The election follows months of political deadlock and protests demanding judicial reform. Radev, a former fighter pilot, has promised to tackle corruption and end oligarchic control. His support is split on ties to Russia, with critics viewing him as pro-Russian. —*PTI*

Maritime piracy: Iran fumes at US' seizure of its ship

Tankers and gas carriers anchored in the Strait of Hormuz, Saturday —*PTI*

Tehran says it is undecided over talks in Pak

WASHINGTON/TEHRAN/ISLAMABAD, 20 APRIL

Iran's military headquarters described the US action on its ships as a violation of the ceasefire and an act of "maritime piracy", while state media reported that Tehran would respond decisively. In parallel, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said on Monday that Iran had not yet decided to participate in any upcoming negotiations with the United States, adding that "no plans" were currently in place.

Its joint military command said that Tehran would again enforce restrictions it had imposed earlier in the conflict.

The seizure has thrown into question the viability of planned talks in Islamabad, which Pakistan had been preparing to host as early as Tuesday.

Pakistani officials said diplomatic contacts had intensified over the past 24 hours in an attempt to salvage the meeting. However, uncertainty is growing as Iran's public stance appears to harden.

Iranian state media, citing anonymous sources, has also indicated the negotiations may not go ahead.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reportedly told his Pakistani counterpart that US threats against Iranian ships and ports were "clear signs" of Washington's lack of sincerity ahead of the proposed talks.

The diplomatic uncertainty comes as a tenuous ceasefire — already under pressure — is due to expire by Wednesday. The truce had briefly raised hopes of stabilising a conflict that has disrupted global energy markets and heightened regional insecurity.

Iran has warned it could reimpose strict controls over the strategic waterway, through which roughly one-fifth of global oil supplies typically pass. The strait also serves as a vital route for natural gas, fertilisers and humanitarian goods.

Iranian leaders have intensified their rhetoric in response to US actions. First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref warned that continued pressure would carry global economic consequences.

"The choice is clear: either a free oil market for all, or the risk of significant costs for everyone," he said in a social media post, calling for an end to military and economic pressure on Tehran.

Separately, President Masoud Pezeshkian accused Washington of "bullying and unreasonable behaviour" during both the conflict and ongoing diplomatic efforts, warning that such actions were eroding trust and raising fears that the United States could "betray diplomacy". —*PTI*

WEST ASIA WAR
DAY-52

Iran did not resist seizure as families were on board

Iran's military offered an explanation for why it didn't fight back against US Marines who raided an Iranian vessel in the Gulf of Oman. The Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, which oversees operations of Iran's regular military and its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, said it held back attacking the Marines because the ship's crew had family members aboard the Touska. "They faced constraints in order to protect their lives and ensure their safety, as they were in danger at every moment," it said. —*PTI*

UK CALLS FOR TOLL FREE HORMUZ

LONDON, 20 APRIL

The UK is leading a 50-nation coalition to oppose Iranian proposals for post-conflict tolls on the Strait of Hormuz, advocating instead for unrestricted freedom of navigation.

This initiative, cemented at a recent summit in France, is further supported by a new USD10 billion energy security framework involving Japan.

UK Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said on Sunday she had a key discussion with Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar, on extending the ceasefire and fully reopening shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz. "This is a critical diplomatic moment with the ceasefire looming," Cooper noted.

Cooper is on an "intensified shuttle diplomacy tour" to advance coordination with allies, including Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, the UAE, Ukraine and most recently Japan.

The statement comes as the British military has declared the situation in the Strait and the Persian Gulf to be 'critical,' its highest risk level."

The Iranian navy reimposed tight restrictions on transit through the strait as the US military implements a blockade on Iranian ports and waters. The UK Military also cited multiple attacks on Saturday by Iranian forces on vessels. —*PTI*

—FREEPIK

OVER 3,300 PEOPLE HAVE DIED IN IRAN DURING WAR

Iran on Monday reported a new death toll from the war against Israel and the US, saying at least 3,375 people had been killed in the conflict. The figure came from Abbas Masjedi, the head of Iran's Legal Medicine Organisation. Masjedi reported that only four of the dead remain unidentified. While he did not provide a civilian versus security force casualty breakdown, he stated that 2,875 of the dead were male, 496 were female, and 383 were children aged 18 or under.

CRUCIFYING THE CRUCIFIED

An image showing an Israeli soldier smashing a statue of Jesus Christ with a sledgehammer in southern Lebanon has sparked widespread outrage online, drawing over 6.8 million views. The Israeli military confirmed the soldier's identity and condemned the act as inconsistent with its values. Israel PM Benjamin Netanyahu said authorities are conducting a criminal probe and that "appropriately harsh disciplinary action" will be taken against those responsible. He added that Israel upholds religious tolerance and expressed regret over the incident —*SCREENGRAB*

EU hosts Palestinian PM, bats for peace in Gaza

BRUSSELS, 20 APRIL

Spain PM Pedro Sánchez with Palestinian PM Mohamed Mustafa

More than 60 nations are sending representatives to Brussels to meet with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohamed Mustafa to discuss stability, security and long-term peace in Israel and the West Bank.

The EU is the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority. While the 27-nation bloc declined joining the US President Donald Trump's Board of Peace, the EU is keen to avoid being sidelined in regional diplomacy.

Gaza requires "one state, one government, one law and one goal," Mustafa said on Monday in Brussels. He also called for "the full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza." Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prevot, co-hosting with EU diplomat Kaja Kallas, warned that the devastation in Gaza is eroding the prospect of a two-state solution. 'It is becoming more difficult by the day,' Prevot said, though he maintained that it remains the "only realistic path to lasting peace, for Israelis, for Palestinians and for the stability of the entire region." —*PTI*

Israel reveals new forward defence line in south Lebanon

The Israeli military says it has established the line and released a map showing troops operating south of it.The deployment has been described elsewhere as a "Yellow Line." It says five divisions are working to dismantle Hezbollah infrastructure. The line was not mentioned in ceasefire terms published by the United States.Meanwhile, Hezbollah claimed it detonated explosives on Sunday afternoon in an attack against Israeli forces. It said bombs planted by Hezbollah fighters exploded and destroyed four tanks.

US and allied forces start combat drills with Philippines

Amid war in Middle East, the United States and the Philippines kicked off one of their largest combat exercises Monday in an annual display of allied military might aimed at deterring aggression in Asia. The large-scale combat drills between the US and Philippines will include other militaries from Japan, France and Canada, which have signed visiting forces agreements with Manila, the Philippine military said. China has objected to the US-Philippine drills, saying they are aimed at containing its global rise.

US funding helps Cyprus upgrade military bases

With help from US taxpayers, Cyprus is upgrading key military installations to strengthen the mission it has carved for itself as a safe haven in the eastern Mediterranean for evacuees from the conflict-wracked West Asia and as a humanitarian aid hub. Cyprus' main Evangelos Florakis naval base, just 229km from Lebanon's coast, will get a new, US European Command-funded heliport for airlifting evacuees out of conflict zones. Lt. Col. Paris Samoutis, a spokesperson for Cyprus' National Guard, said the US has put up 500,000 euros for a development plan.

Pak Interior Minister meets US Charge d'Affaires

Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met US Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Baker at the US Embassy in Islamabad on Monday to discuss strengthening bilateral ties and preparations for a second round of talks in Islamabad this week, though no start date was specified. Naqvi also briefed Baker on special security measures needed to ensure the safety of visiting delegations. During the meeting, Baker reportedly expressed appreciation for Pakistan's role in easing regional tensions and facilitating security support for high-level negotiations.

7.5 QUAKE STRIKES JAPAN, TSUNAMI ALERT ISSUED

TOKYO, 20 APRIL

A powerful earthquake struck off the northern Japanese coast, and the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a tsunami alert.

The quake, registering a preliminary magnitude of 7.5, occurred off the coast of Sanriku at around 4:53 pm (0753 GMT), at a depth of about 10 kilometres below the sea surface.

A tsunami of about 80 centimetres (2.6 feet) was detected at the Kuji port in the Iwate prefecture, and a smaller tsunami of 40 centimetres (1.3 feet) was recorded at another port in the prefecture.

The agency urged people to stay away from the coast or along rivers and take shelter on higher grounds. It also cautioned people against possible aftershocks for about a week.

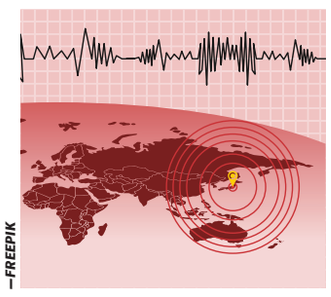
- A tsunami of about 80CM was detected at the Kuji port in the Iwate prefecture, and a smaller tsunami of 40cm was recorded at another port.

The Iwate prefecture issued non-binding evacuation advisories to residents in 11 towns.

A tsunami of up to 3 metres (10 feet) could hit the area, the agency said. In addition to the tsunami alert in Iwate and Aomori to the north and southeastern Hokkaido, the agency also issued a milder tsunami advisory for the coasts of Miyagi and Fukushima, south of the epicentre.

Another 7.5 magnitude quake in December left dozens injured.

It's been 15 years since a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami on 11 March 2011, ravaged northern Japan, caused more than 22,000 deaths and forced nearly half a million people to flee. Some 1,60,000 people fled Fukushima because of the radiation from the tsunami-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. —*PTI*



—FREEPIK

THE EPSTEIN MESS

Mandelson storm: UK PM faces angry MPs

LONDON, 20 APRIL

Keir Starmer will face a tough barrage of questions over Peter Mandelson's ties to Epstein —*PTI*

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will try on Monday to get a grip on a crisis that has left power slipping from his grasp.

Starmer will face a tough barrage of questions in Parliament when he stands up to explain why Peter Mandelson, a scandal-tarnished politician and friend of Jeffrey Epstein, became Britain's ambassador to Washington despite failing security checks — and seemingly without Starmer being told about the concerns.

The revelation has left furious opponents calling for Starmer to resign and uneasy allies wondering what else the nation's leader didn't know about.

Starmer repeatedly told lawmakers that "due process" was followed when Mandelson was appointed. He now says he's "furious" that he wasn't informed that an intensive vetting had recommended Mandelson not be given clearance. The Foreign Office, which oversees diplomatic appointments, cleared him anyway.

Starmer fired the department's top civil servant, Olly Robbins, within hours of the revelation by The Guardian last week.

Robbins is expected to give his own version of events to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee on Tuesday.

All the main opposition parties have called on Starmer to resign. Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch said in the Mail on Sunday that he had "misled Parliament over Mandelson, and is taking the public for fools."

Ed Davey, leader of the opposition Liberal Democrats, said Starmer had "showed catastrophic misjudgement."

British police arrested Mandelson in February on suspicion of misconduct in public office. Mandelson has denied the charges. He does not face allegations of sexual misconduct. —*PTI*

UK police arrest 2 for attacking synagogue

LONDON, 20 APRIL

—FREEPIK

British police arrested two teenagers in connection with a weekend arson attack on a synagogue in northwest London, as Jewish leaders expressed concern about incidents targeting their community.

Deputy Commissioner Matt Jukes of London's Metropolitan Police on Monday said officers arrested two men, aged 19 and 17, in connection with the attack on the Kenton United Synagogue. The department has made 15 arrests regarding six attacks on Jewish targets and a Persian-language media organisation critical of Iran's government, he told the BBC.

One "serious line of inquiry" is that Iran is hiring local criminals to carry out these attacks, Jukes said.

A bottle containing a flammable liquid was thrown through the window of the Harrow synagogue on Saturday, causing smoke damage, police said.

Police on Friday closed Kensington Gardens, a London park visited by thousands of tourists and local residents every day, to investigate an alleged drone attack on the Israeli embassy. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Vicki Evans said on Sunday that a group calling itself Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia had claimed responsibility for the attacks in Britain. —*PTI*

Rupee falls to settle at 93.10 against USD

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

The rupee pared its initial gains and settled with a loss of 19 paise at 93.10 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, after fresh tension in West Asia led to an increased demand for the American currency and kept crude prices steady. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 92.73 and touched an intra-day high of 92.70 against the greenback. It also hit the day's low of 93.24 during the session. The rupee strengthened 28 paise to settle at 92.91 against the US dollar on 17 April. The dollar index rose 0.14 per cent to 98.03. Brent crude was trading 4.64 per cent down at USD 94.57 per barrel. Domestic equity markets stood almost flat amid tense geopolitics.—*PTI*

Gold jumps to Rs 1.57L/10g, silver at Rs 2.57L/kg

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Silver prices climbed Rs 4,300 to Rs 2.57 lakh per kilogram in the national capital on Monday, while gold advanced to Rs 1.57 lakh per 10 grams on fresh buying by retailers and stockists. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal jumped Rs 4,300 to Rs 2,57,300 per kg (inclusive of all taxes) Rs 2,53,000 per kg on 17 April. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also gained Rs 800 to Rs 1,57,000 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). The yellow metal had finished at Rs 1,56,200 per 10 grams in the previous market session. Spot silver slipped USD 1.09, or 1.35 per cent, to USD 79.71 per ounce, and gold was traded 0.52 per cent to USD 4,805.09 per ounce "Gold started the week on a weaker note, reflecting a shift in geopolitical and macro conditions over the weekend," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities said. Investors will turn their focus on global macroeconomic data and consumer sentiments.—*PTI*

Jindal enters retail market with rebar launch

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Jindal Stainless Ltd announced its retail foray on Monday with the launch of stainless steel rebar Jindal Infinity, marking a strategic extension into the construction value chain. The move will allow the company to directly reach end-consumers, moving beyond its traditional B2B model. Compared to conventional reinforcement, stainless steel rebar offers superior corrosion resistance and a higher critical chloride threshold, significantly enhancing durability in aggressive environments. Jindal Stainless had an annual turnover of Rs 40,182 crore in FY25. As of March 2025, it operates 16 stainless steel manufacturing and processing facilities across India, Spain, and Indonesia, with a presence in 12 countries worldwide. In India, it has 10 sales offices and six service centres. —*PTI*

UP allows wheat sale at MSP sans online registration

LUCKNOW, 20 APRIL

Farmers in Uttar Pradesh can now sell wheat at 5,400 government procurement centres without registering online, a government statement said on Monday. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed all district magistrates to implement this order immediately. Earlier this year, the Farmer Registry, a digital process for farmer identification and crop verification, was made mandatory for farmers willing to sell wheat at the minimum support price at government procurement centres. However, many farmers couldn't sell at government centres due to registration requirements and were forced to sell their produce to middlemen at lower prices. The Food and Civil Supplies Department said over 2.38 lakh metric tonnes of wheat have been procured from over 42,000 farmers. —*PTI*

Markets end flat amid geopolitical headwinds

Sensex rises marginally to 26.76 points, while Nifty gained 11.30 points

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed almost unchanged in a volatile session on Monday as investors turned cautious amid mounting geopolitical headwinds and rising crude oil prices. The 30-share BSE Sensex closed marginally up 26.76 points or 0.03 per cent at 78,520.30. During the day, it hit a high of 78,942.45 and a low of 78,203.30, gyrating 739.15 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged up 11.30 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 24,364.85. Among the 30-Sensex firms, Trent, State Bank of India, Asian Paints, NTPC, Bajaj Finance and InterGlobe Aviation were the major winners.

Larsen & Toubro, Bharat Electronics, HCL Tech and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the laggards. "Renewed disputes over the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz injected volatility into global markets. Investors interpreted the recent disruptions as potential negotiation tactics rather than the onset of a full-scale conflict," Vinod Nair, head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd.

With the ceasefire between US and Iran expiring this week, market participants remain cautious, awaiting further developments, experts said.

The BSE SmallCap Select index dipped 0.15 per cent and MidCap Select index lost 0.12 per cent. Power jumped 1.24 per cent, followed by Utilities (0.88 per cent), PSU Bank (0.70 per cent) and Capital Goods (0.55 per cent). However, BSE Focused IT declined 0.93 per cent, IT (0.79 per cent), Realty (0.70 per cent), Telecommunication (0.66 per cent) and Commodities (0.34 per cent). A total of 2,593 stocks declined, while 1,810 advanced and 175 remained unchanged on the BSE. —*PTI*

WORLD MARKETS

DOW (US)	49,471.53	(0.1%) ↑
S&P 500 (US)	7,138.62	(0.08 %) ↓
Nasdaq (US)	24,4i8.87	(1.45 %) ↑
Nikkei (Japan)	58,824.89	(0.60%) ↑
Hang Seng (China)	26,361.08	(0.77%) ↑
DAX (Germany)	24,458.04	(0.99%) ↓
FTSE 100 (UK)	10, 624.38	(0.41%) ↓
CAC 40 (Paris)	8,367.20	(0.60%) ↓
KOSPI S Korea	6,219.09	(0.44%) ↑

ICICI Bank shares climb over 2%

Shares of ICICI Bank climbed over 2 per cent in Monday morning trade after the firm reported a 9.28 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit for the March quarter. The stock edged higher by 2.13 per cent to Rs 1,376.25 on the BSE. At the NSE, it advanced 2.19 per cent to Rs 1,376.40. ICICI Bank reported a 9.28 per cent rise in its net profit to Rs 14,755 crore for the March quarter, helped by a nearly 90 per cent drop in provisioning. —*PTI*

WORTH RS 79,450 CRORE

A look at India's first greenfield refinery complex

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

India's first greenfield integrated refinery-cum-petrochemical complex has come up at Pachpadra in Balotra in Rajasthan.

The project, worth Rs 79,450 crore, represents a significant milestone in India's energy and petrochemical sector to drive industrial growth.

The state-of-the-art complex integrates refining and petrochemical production, with a petrochemical capacity of 2.4 MMTPA. The refinery features a high Nelson Complexity Index of 17.0 and petrochemical yields exceeding 26 per cent, aligning with global benchmarks for efficiency and sustainability.

The project will serve as an anchor industry for the development of a petrochemical and plastic park in the region, promoting downstream industries and ancillary sectors, along with generating employment.

The 9 million metric tonnes per annum (MMTPA) greenfield refinery-cum-petrochemical complex has been developed as a joint venture between Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) and the Rajasthan government.

The HPCL Rajasthan Refinery Limited (HRRL) complex will produce petrol and diesel along with petrochemical products such as polypropylene, linear low-density polyethylene, high-density polyethylene, benzene, toluene and butadiene.

The project, spread over 4,400 acres, will reduce dependence of imports of the country in the petrochemical sector and provide skill development among youths.

MANGLA OILFIELD BOOSTS CRUDE OUTPUT

Rajasthan's Mangala oilfield has logged an increase in production by around 2,000 barrels per day, aided by the use of advanced exploration technologies.

The country's largest onshore oilfield's daily output is 80,000 barrels.

Cairn Oil and Gas, the operator of the Mangala implemented enhanced oil recovery methods to improve recovery rates and sustain long-term production.

Such incremental gains from mature onshore fields provides a short-term cushion for India by supporting domestic output —*PTI*

Drone bribery: DGCA & Reliance officials held

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has caught red-handed a deputy director general of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and a senior Reliance official in an alleged Rs 2.5 lakh bribery case related to seeking approval for importing drones.

Disclosing this the CBI said on Sunday that its FIR included the private executive Bharat Mathur, a senior vice-president at Reliance Industries Ltd and associated with Asteria Aerospace Ltd.

CBI FIR reportedly stated that Mathur allegedly contacted DGCA's M Devula in March to follow up on a pending application for the import of drones.

A Reliance spokesperson,

however in a statement said that Mathur worked as a consultant. He said the company was 'not aware of any transaction involving him of the nature being referred to, nor have we approved any such unauthorised transaction.'

The two were arrested at the time of exchanging bribe on Sunday. During searches at Devula's residence and other premises Rs 37 lakh in cash were recovered, besides gold, silver and multiple digital devices.

The FIR further mentioned that the bribe money was 'settled' at Rs 5 lakh per file and it was to have been paid to process the necessary approvals. Devula, however, sought undue advantage in exchange for clearing the files pending with the regulator, the CBI alleged —*Agencies*

Crude prices jump $95 per barrel as Iran war escalates

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The global benchmark Brent crude oil prices jumped to around $96 per bbl on Monday in the wake of the US Navy's attack on Iranian flagged cargo vessel.

The rise in price came amid a cautious investors' sentiment after the US President Donald Trump informed about the US Naval strike on Iranian-flagged cargo ship amid the US blockage of the Strait of Hormuz.

The development happened amid recent allegation regarding the violation of ceasefire in the US-Iran ceasefire in the West Asia.

The crude oil prices increased after the commodity closed lower near the $91 per bbl region. On Friday last week, the oil prices had come down to $86.09 per bbl, Investing.com data showed.

The West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil prices also increased to more than $88 per bbl on Monday, after the commodity markets closed lower around the $84 per bbl levels.

In the early morning hours at 7:20 am (IST), the Brent crude oil prices were trading over 5 per cent higher at $95.02 per bbl as against $90.38 per bbl at the previous commodity market close.

The US-based WTI crude oil prices traded 5.3 per cent higher at $87.02 per bbl as against $82.5 per bbl at the previous market close. The New York Mercantile Exchange-based COMEX gold prices traded 1.2 per cent lower at $4,821.20 per ounce. —*Agencies*

Groww's Q4 profit rises to Rs 686 cr

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Billionbrains Garage Ventures, the parent company of stock broking firm Groww, on Monday reported an over two-fold growth in profit after tax to Rs 686 crore for the three months ended March 2026.

The company had posted a PAT of Rs 309 crore in the same quarter preceding fiscal.

Its total income surged 81 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1,536 crore in the quarter under review from Rs 850 crore in the January-March quarter of 2025, Bengaluru-headquartered Groww said in a stock exchange filing.

The firm's total transacting users stood at 2.16 crore at the end of the March quarter, marking a 25 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth. Its active user base stood at 1.67 crore.

Further, its total customer assets accelerated 36 per cent year-on-year to Rs 3 lakh crore.

According to the company, the operating leverage played out across all the cost buckets, leading to PAT margin expanding by 8.3 per cent YoY.

For the full fiscal year FY26, Groww's PAT grew 14 per cent year-on-year to Rs 2,083 crore and total income rose 19 per cent year-on-year to Rs 4,816 crore. —*PTI*

MCX to start coal exchange firm

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

India's leading commodity bourse Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) said on Monday it has received approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) to invest in a proposed coal exchange company.

MCX, which received the approval of the market regulator, plans to incorporate a new wholly owned subsidiary, likely to be named MCX Coal Exchange Ltd or MCX Coal Exchange of India Ltd.

The exchange said it will commit capital of up to Rs 100 crore to the new subsidiary to meet minimum net worth requirements under draft Coal Exchange Rules, and will initially hold a 100 per cent stake, with the option to bring in strategic partners at a later stage.

The new entity will provide a transparent, standardised digital platform for the physical delivery of coal at market-driven prices, and will submit an application to the Coal Controller Organisation of India once prescribed timelines are in place.

The move builds on MCX's existing energy derivatives business, which includes highly liquid contracts on crude oil and natural gas and electricity futures. The addition is seen rounding out the exchange's presence across the energy complex.

The coal exchange is aimed at creating a regulated, technology-driven marketplace that enables efficient price discovery for the fuel. —*PTI*

SCORED 70.26 IN BID

Creditors' panel backs Adani in Jaypee insolvency

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Committee of Creditors (CoC), defended the resolution process in the Jaypee Infratech insolvency proceedings before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) on Monday.

Mehta asserted that the process was transparent and followed a pre-disclosed scoring mechanism to determine the applicants' rankings.

Adani Enterprises topped the rankings with 70.26 marks, ahead of Vedanta's 58.85. Mehta said the lead was driven by higher upfront payments and stronger commitments on deferred payments and equity infusion, reflecting objective value maximisation for creditors.

The central issue in Vedanta's appeal was its addendum, which attempted to revise its resolution plan post-submission. Mehta argued that such changes, once bids are finalised, are strictly prohibited. Mehta underscored that multiple bidders, including Dalmia Group and Jindal Power Limited, participated in the process, all of whom were bound by the same evaluation matrix—outlined in the Information Memorandum and Resolution Plan (RFRP) — which is a binding force, ensuring fairness in bid assessment

Vedanta's addendum, which sought to revise its resolution plan after submission. Mehta argued that the process note explicitly prohibited any modification once bids were finalised and the evaluation matrix frozen. Allowing such changes would erode procedural certainty and risk triggering an endless cycle of bid revisions.

He raised concerns about a possible leakage of bid-sensitive information, — *ANI*

Postal Dept posts FY26 profits of Rs 15,296 cr

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The Department of Posts reported a "historic year" with revenue of Rs 15,296 crore for the financial year 2025-26 (FY26), a 16 per cent year-on-year growth, Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Monday following the Postal Department's annual business meet in New Delhi.

Of the 23 postal circles, eight achieved over 90 per cent of their target, while 14 reached between 80 and 90 per cent. Only one circle fell below 80 per cent. Scindia stated that this performance underscores "a major transformation" in the Department's shift toward becoming a service-driven organisation.

Post Office Savings Bank posted Rs 7,756 crore, growing at 13 per cent. Similarly, postal life insurance and rural postal life insurance grew 25 per cent year-on-year.

Meanwhile, parcel revenue grew 69 per cent over the previous fiscal, driven by strong performances in Jharkhand, Telangana, and Gujarat. However, international mail faced 'major problems' due to global disruptions, and citizen-centric services rose 70 per cent in FY26. —*PTI*

-PTI

Pranavi Urs finishes tied 36th in Joburg Ladies Open

JOHANNESBURG, 20 APRIL

Indian golfer Pranavi Urs closed the week with a round of 1-under 72 and finished tied 36th at the Joburg Ladies Open here. The sole Indian to make the cut this week had a roller-coaster of a round with one stretch of four holes from the second to the fifth having par-birdie-eagle-bogey.Overall, she had two birdies, an eagle and three bogeys in her 72 at the Par-73 Randpark Golf course. The other four Indians, Diksha Dagar, Tvesa Malik, Avani Prashanth and Hitaashee Bakshi, missed the cut. Meanwhile, it took five extra holes to separate Agathe Laisne and Kirsten Rudgeley as Laisne from France won a marathon playoff to claim her second Ladies European Tour (LET) victory of the season.—*PTI*

Jon caps wild week in Mexico with another LIV Golf win

MEXICO CITY, 20 APRIL

Jon Rahm capped off a chaotic week on LIV Golf when he closed with a 7-under 64 for a six-shot victory in LIV Golf Mexico City, his second victory this year on the Saudi-funded circuit. Rahm went all of last season on LIV without winning, though he did claim the points title. And he had experienced disappointment before in 2017 at Chapultepec Golf Club when it was a World Golf Championship. There was no doubt this time after he made a birdie on the reachable par-4 second hole and then holed out for eagle on the next hole. He played bogey-free. "If you had told me last week on Thursday afternoon that I'd be winning by a six-shot margin this week.—*PTI*

-PTI

It's not like no one can shake me: Sujeet Kalkal

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Virtually unbeatable in the 65kg category over the past year in the international circuit, Indian wrestler Sujeet Kalkal says he is "a favourite of himself" even as he remains grounded about the unpredictability of results in elite sport. Sujeet, who has clinched gold medals in every competition he has entered since that U23 Asian Championship triumph in June 2025 -- barring the Senior World Championship believes consistency and self-belief have been key to his rise. His most recent gold medal-winning performance came at the Senior Asian Championship in Bishkek. "I don't follow anyone in particular. I like watching my own bouts, mostly on Sundays.—*PTI*

DP World Players Championship tees off in Nuh

NUH, 20 APRIL

As many as 130 professionals, including leading domestic names such as Veer Ahlawat, Om Prakash Chouhan and Manu Gandas, will vie for top honours when the Rs 1 crore DP World Players Championship tees off at the Classic Golf & Country Club here on Monday. The tournament will have a strong field, with Saptak Talwar (2026 DP World PGTI Order of Merit leader), Khalin Joshi and Honey Baisoya (both DP World PGTI winners this season), and Angad Cheema (two-time DP World PGTI winner last year) also competing. Sri Lanka's N Thangaraja, a three-time winner on the DP World PGTI last year, will be the leading foreign contingent in the field.—*PTI*

SRH eye home win, DC seek consistency in mid-table clash

Both teams sit on 6 points, though SRH are marginally ahead

HYDERABAD, 20 APRIL

Sunrisers Hyderabad will look to make home advantage count when they take on inconsistent Delhi Capitals in a mid-table clash of the Indian Premier League here on Tuesday.

Both teams sit on six points, though fourth-placed Sunrisers Hyderabad are marginally ahead, having played a game more and boasting a superior Net Run Rate.

For SRH, the narrative has been one of gradual correction. In the absence of skipper Pat Cummins, who has linked up with the squad but remains unavailable for this game, their bowling unit initially looked thin.

But over the last two games, a relatively unheralded group has stepped up. Names like Praful Hinge, Sakib Husain, and Shivang Kumar have seized their opportunity, injecting both energy and control into the attack.

Hinge's standout performance against the Rajasthan Royals was followed by a collective bowling effort, led by Eshan Malinga, against the Chennai Super Kings, where SRH delivered a clinical exhibition of death bowling, helping them secure back-to-back wins at home. That resurgence with the ball has been central to their recent momentum.

However, the same cannot be said of their batting. SRH's approach remains aggressively high-risk, but the returns have been inconsistent. Openers Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, along with stand-in captain Ishan Kishan, have not quite clicked together.

The lack of collective starts has repeatedly exposed the middle order. As a result, the burden has largely fallen on Heinrich Klaasen. The South African has often walked in after the fall of quick wickets, forcing him to rebuild before launching.

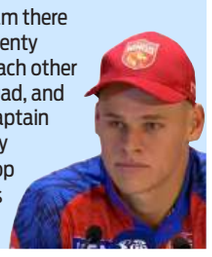
While capable of devastating acceleration, Klaasen has had to curb his instincts early, making his job significantly harder. Delhi Capitals, meanwhile, have inconsistency issues of their own.

Their experienced players like KL Rahul, Pathum Nissanka, and Tristan Stubbs have been among the runs, but the team would need bigger contributions from them, especially on batting-friendly surfaces.

Sameer Rizvi, after starring in DC's opening two matches, has slipped into a lean patch with single-digit scores in the last three games. The match starts at 7.30 pm. —*PTI*

We take little things out of each other's books: Connolly on PBKS' success

Unbeaten so far this season, Punjab Kings have fostered a positive dressing-room environment, with players learning from one another and "enjoying taking little notes off each other," said batting all-rounder Cooper Connolly. Connolly made 87 off 46 balls and shared 182 runs for the second wicket with opener Priyansh Arya (93 off 37 balls) to set up a massive 254 for 7 for the Punjab side in their 54-run win against Lucknow Super Giants on Sunday. "We all have discussions about what works for each other, and we take little things out of each other's books. We've enjoyed sort of taking little notes off each other," said Connolly about his side's five-match winning run in the league so far. "We're all looking to try and get better, that's what the game's about, be the best team there is, and we're looking forward to plenty more notes and messages from each other to get better as a group and a squad, and not my game." Connolly lauded captain Shreyas Iyer for leading the side by example. PBKS are currently on top of the IPL standings with 11 points from six matches.



EUROPEAN T20 PREMIER LEAGUE

Abhishek Bachchan announces Glasgow Franchise

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

The European T20 Premier League (ETPL) on Monday announced 'Glasgow Mugafians' as one of the competing teams for the tournament to be held across six cities from 26 August to 20 September.

ETPL, led by Abhishek Bachchan, announces Glasgow Franchise, Chris Gayle, and the Mugafi group acquire team ownership

The ETPL is a joint venture between Cricket Ireland and Rules Global (Rules X). Bollywood star Abhishek Bachchan is one of the co-founders. The Glasgow-based franchise representing Scotland is backed by the Mugafi Group as founding partner and owned by Tansha Batra, with West Indies legend Chris Gayle joining as Co-Owner and Global Brand Ambassador. Mugafi Group, the media, entertainment, and IP platform founded by Vipul Agrawal, will provide the commercial, content, and digital infrastructure to support the franchise's global ambitions.

The inaugural edition of the ETPL, Europe's first ICC-sanctioned T20 franchise league, features six franchises representing Glasgow, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, Dublin, Belfast, and Rotterdam, competing in 33 matches.

Chris Gayle, Co-Owner and Global Brand Ambassador

Stepping into the role of co-owner of Glasgow Mugafians marks an exciting new chapter for me. The ETPL is already creating waves globally, and having played in franchise leagues around the world, I'm confident this will be something special. Europe represents cricket's final frontier, and the ETPL has the potential to unravel promising local talent and nurture future heroes who will strengthen the sport in that region. I can't wait to get started on this new journey. —*PTI*

India has extremely high' doping risk: Athletics Integrity Unit

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

India has been elevated to a list of nations, including Russia, where there is an "extremely high" risk of doping, the Athletics Integrity Unit said on Monday.

The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) joins the likes of Russia, Belarus, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and Ukraine in the AIU's highest rating of Category A after being moved up from Category B.

Category A means India's athletes must now comply with more stringent anti-doping requirements.

The world's most populous country ranked in the top two for the most anti-doping violations in athletics between 2022 and 2025, the AIU said. "The doping situation in India has been high-risk for a long time and, unfortunately, the quality of the domestic anti-doping programme is simply not proportionate to the doping risk," AIU chair David Howman said. "While the AFI has advocated for anti-doping reforms within India, not enough has changed. "The AIU will now work with the AFI to achieve reforms to safeguard the integrity of the sport of athletics. —*PTI*

-PTI

HCL Squash: Suraj Chand bags men's singles title

CHENNAI, 20 APRIL

India's Suraj Kumar Chand secured the HCL Squash PSA Challenger Tour title with a straight-game win over South Korea's Jeongmin Ryu in the men's final here on Monday.

The Indian second seed, ranked 134 in the world, beat his eighth seed opponent 11-5, 11-9, 11-3 for his fourth PSA Tour title. Egyptian seventh seed Rouqaia Othman defeated Malaysian second seed Harleein Tan 12-10, 11-7, 9-11, 11-7 in the women's final.

"We would like to thank our sponsors and partners, especially HCL, MYAS, and SAI, for their support. Having an Indian winner makes it special," SRFI Secretary-General Cyrus Poncha said in a release. —*PTI*

ISSF JUNIOR WORLD CUP

INDIA'S JUNIOR SHOOTERS BRACE UP FOR CAIRO TOURNEY

CAIRO, 20 APRIL

India's junior shooters will be in action for the first time this season with two medals to be decided in the women's 10m air rifle event and men's 10m air pistol competition when the ISSF Junior World Cup commences here on Tuesday.

India is fielding a strong contingent of 71 athletes, with the first batch of 58 athletes along with the support staff arriving in Cairo on Sunday.

Day one of the competition will start with a 25m pistol precision stage for both men and women, along with 75 targets for skeet men and women.

India has fielded six athletes in the 10m air rifle women's event, headlined by Asian Junior record holder and 2025 ISSF Suhl World Cup champion Shambhavi Kshirsagar. She will be joined by the 2025 Asian champion in 50m rifle 3 positions, Anushka Thokur, silver and bronze medal winners in 2026 New Delhi Asian Championships, Manyata Singh and Aneesha Sharma, 2024 Asian Championships bronze medallist Anvii Rathod, and Panaah Bhugra.

- Day one of the competition will start with a 25m pistol precision stage for both men and women, along with 75 targets for skeet men and women.

The men's 10m air pistol event will also have six athletes from India taking the field, which will be led by former Junior world champion and 2023 World Championship gold medallist in the mixed event, Shiva Narwal, who will be competing in an international event after a gap of three years.

Deaflympics 2025 champion Abhinav Deshwal, Abhinav Choudhary, Abhay Dhama, Himanshu Rana, and 17-year-old Chirag Sharma are the other athletes in the lineup.

A maximum of three athletes per country, the three top-ranked after the qualification round, will proceed to the final. —*PTI*

Kyrgios confirms Halle Open participation

PARIS, 20 APRIL

Former Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios, who has not played a competitive singles match since January, will take part in this year's Halle grasscourt tournament in June, organisers said on Monday.

The 30-year-old, who has struggled for years with a series of wrist and knee injuries, is a major crowd-puller but does not have a singles ranking at the moment. The Halle tournament is a traditional warm-up event for Wimbledon.

The Australian's only singles match of the year was a straight-sets first-round loss to American Aleksandar Kovacevic in Brisbane in January.

Kyrgios, who reached the Wimbledon final in 2022, has played just seven singles matches between January 2023 and April 2026. —*PTI*

NAHID TAKES 5 WICKETS AS B'DESH BEATS NZ TO LEVEL ODI SERIES

MIRPUR, 20 APRIL

Pace bowler Nahid Rana claimed 5-32 to help Bangladesh win the second ODI against New Zealand by six wickets and level the three-match series on Monday.

The second five-wicket haul in Nahid's brief career was instrumental in bowling out New Zealand for 198 in 48.4 overs, giving Bangladesh a strong chance to level the series.

Opener Tanzid Hasan then struck a fluent 58-ball 76, and Najmul Hossain Shanto made a patient 50 before retiring hurt, taking Bangladesh to the winning target of 199-4 with 87 balls remaining.

New Zealand captain Tom Latham opted to bat first, but his side struggled to deal with Nahid's express pace on a slow surface.

Opener Nick Kelly hit 83 off 102 balls, including 14 fours, to register his maiden fifty-plus score and push the visitors close to the 200-mark.

However, he received little support from the rest of the batting lineup, with no other batter crossing 20. —*PTI*

INDIAN IN WSK HISTORY

Atiqa zooms to P2 in Italy for highest finish

LONATO, 20 APRIL

Indian racer Atiqa Mir, right, poses on the podium after finishing third in the final of Round 1 -*PTI*

Racing prodigy Atiqa Mir keeps scaling new heights, and on this occasion, the 11-year-old recorded the highest-ever race finish by an Indian in her category at World Series Karting (WSK) with a stellar P2 in Race 1 here.

Atiqa, the first Indian to be supported by Formula 1 Academy and the highest-ranked female worldwide in the OKNJ category (age 12-14), showed scorching speed in the opening race of WSK Euro Series Round 2 at the South Garda Karting here. This was also the second time ever that a female finished P2 in a race in the OKNJ class at WSK.

Atiqa has been turning heads with the sheer weight of her performances on the European circuit, and this weekend, among the spectators in Lonato were Mercedes F1 boss Toto Wolff and their star driver George Russell.

Atiqa hit her straps from the get-go, finishing P2 in the warmup. In qualifying, she was a contender for pole position but missed the all-important slipstream, usually worth 2 tenths of a second. Despite that, she finished fourth fastest in her group and only a 10th of a second behind the pole sitter.

The highlight of Atiqa's weekend was unarguably Race 1, where she finished P2. She displayed strong racecraft and speed while battling the best drivers in the world. She missed P1 by only 8 tenths of a second. —*PTI*

Hockey India announces men's coaching camp

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Hockey India on Monday named a 36-member core probable group for the upcoming senior men's national coaching camp, scheduled to be held at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre in Bengaluru from 20 April to 9 May. The coaching camp will focus on tactical cohesion, conditioning, and match-simulation sessions as the team aims to fine-tune its preparations in the lead-up to a busy international season, which includes the European leg of the FIH Pro League 2025-56, World Cup, and Asian Games.

Also, the squad will look to build rhythm, refine combinations, and strengthen depth across all departments.

The goalkeeping unit features experienced names, including Krishan Bahadur Pathak, Suraj Karkera, and Pawan, alongside emerging talents such as Mohith Honnenahalli Shashikumar and Princedeep Singh.

In defence, the team will be anchored by stalwarts like Harmanpreet Singh and Amit Rohidas, supported by Jarmanpreet Singh. —*PTI*